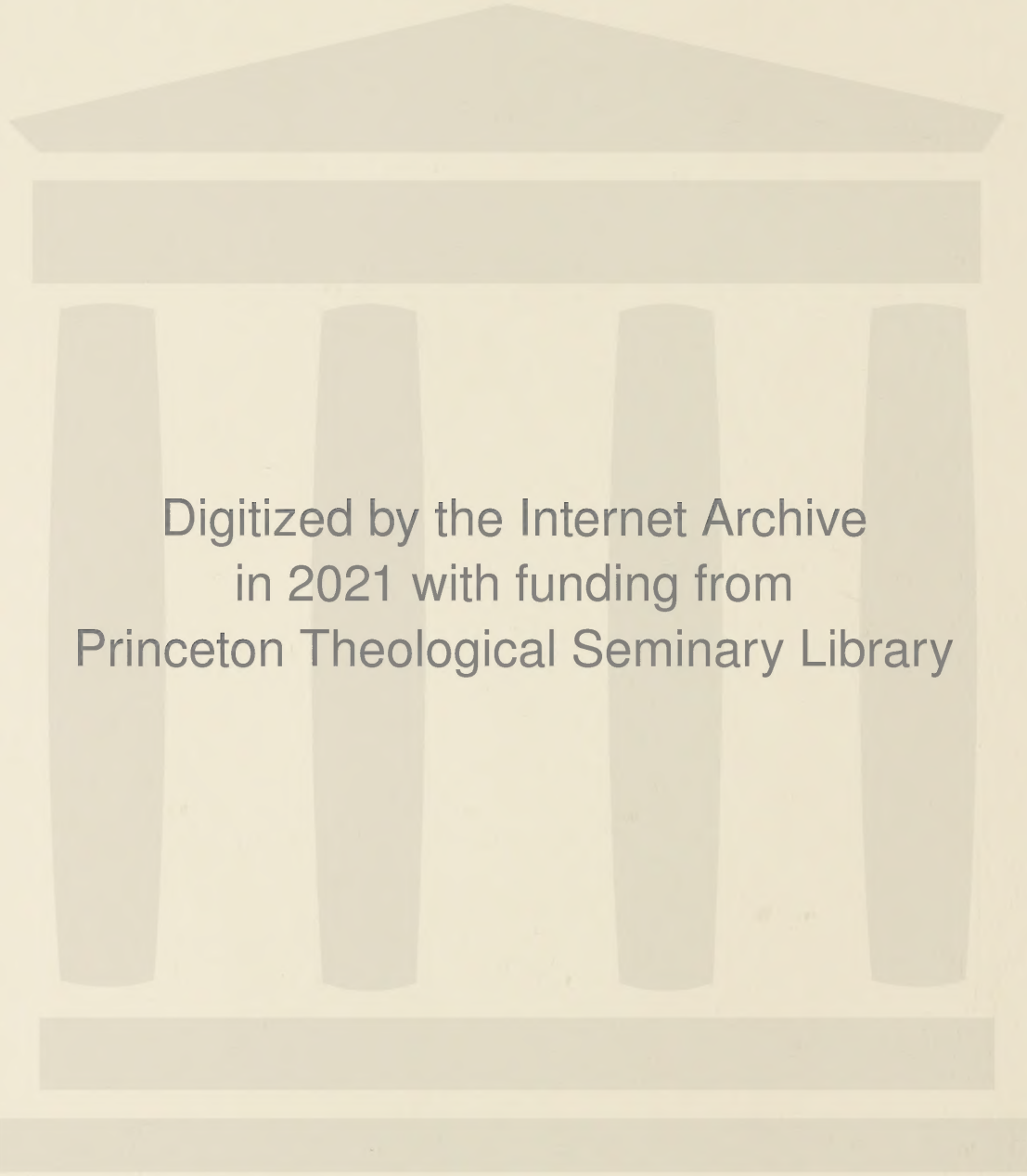


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THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

# The Princeton Theological Review

*a journal by students, alumni/ae, and friends of Princeton Theological Seminary*

*that the light of God's truth may shine bright and increase*

JANUARY 1999

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# The Princeton Theological Review

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1. Submissions by email are encouraged; however, submissions if mailed, should be addressed to the *pTr*, Princeton Theological Seminary, P. O. Box 821, Princeton, New Jersey, 08542.
2. Articles, Essays, and Book Reviews must be given in hard copy and electronic form, either via email or in diskette form.
3. All submissions must be in final form, however the *pTr* reserves the right to edit all submissions before publication.

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## EDITORIAL

Just for a moment, take a trip inside Princeton Seminary and imagine the vicissitudes of divinity students and the ordeal of taking the dreaded "ordination exams". Passing the "ords" is the final hurdle before a Presbyterian candidate for ministry seeking a call in a church, can circulate a Personal Information Form. In non-church jargon, div. students have to pass these tests before they can send out a resume and get a job. The tests are proctored twice a year, once in Autumn and once in Spring. They consist of four sections: one on worship; one on church polity; one on theology; and a fifteen-page exegesis paper of a biblical passage. Students usually take the exams at the start of their third and final year of theological education.

The time is mid-November. The results of the ords are in, and the campus is buzzing with the news. No one is ever prepared for the surprises. Sure there is the middle line-up, those who gave it a good shot and passed two of the four sections. But inevitably it happens that those peculiar students who were always one step ahead in the peculiarities of Reformed theology and Presbyterianism, those who had General Assembly pins from 1981 stuck in their baseball caps, those who had black preaching robes and white neck tabs on their Christmas lists since 1989, the ones we thought could never fail, were shot down in a blaze of glory. And the ones who thought this was not the kind of test you could study for, well, you can guess. The talk goes something like this: "*She* didn't pass? I hear she's been going to Session meetings with her parents since she was six!" "*He* didn't pass? That guy knows the Book of Order better than I know the Bible!" "*She* passed? She didn't open the Book of Confessions 'til she got there!" Such are the bewildered whispers and stunned mutterings of the commoners as the fallen heroes and lucky stiffs pass by on campus. Most of the campus rails against the capricious ways of fortune, grieving with its dejected brothers and sisters, and simultaneously rejoices with its brothers and sisters who have endured the trial.

But the "middlers," who will take the test the following year, display more unabashed self-interest. They congregate around the highly-favored ones who have

proven triumphant, groveling for a morsel of test-taking wisdom, but the crumbs are few and stale. The middlers must rely on themselves. The diligent ones immediately begin recruiting for a study group, mobilizing the brightest minds and the wiliest test-takers to ensure a *tour-de-force* when judgment day comes. At its first meeting the study-group defines the purpose for its meetings over the next year. "Find out what the graders want! Pass the ords!" At its second meeting the members pour over old exams and study guides to establish the means towards attaining this end. The reason for the unexpected results in November suddenly gets much clearer.

The team opens the theology section of an old exam, and turns the highlighter loose on the following phrases: "what the Theological Competence Examination is looking for." This includes: first, "interpreting a confessional stance creatively in context;" second, "interpreting Christian doctrines as expressed in the Reformed tradition in such a way that they illuminate Christian faith and life;" third, "making effective use of theology in pastoral practice as it bears on questions within the spheres of political, social, economic and personal ethics." The group also notes this clarifying footnote: "the modifying phrase 'a Reformed' theology, doctrine, understanding, tradition and the like means a theological perspective in broad agreement with the theology of John Calvin, the whole confessional literature of the Reformed churches and, most specifically, the confessional documents of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)." Hmmm. . . somewhat helpful, but a still a little abstract. Happily the group finds that part B of the instructions explains "what is not being examined here." Namely, "you will not be judged on your 'orthodoxy.' Your particular theological point of view is not under scrutiny, nor need you be inhibited in giving full expression to your convictions."

Hmmm... after due reflection, the group's members discover their theological competence will be judged by the following standard: theology is competent if it is creative, illuminating, and effective, and bears some marks of *broad* agreement with Calvin, the entire body of Reformed confessions, and the PC USA confessions.



But competent theology does not necessarily have anything to do with orthodoxy. No, wait, don't overlook those quotation marks, competent theology does not necessarily have anything to do with "orthodoxy." Okay, for the group's first task, what are these "instructions" trying to say? Assume they put "orthodoxy" in quotes because it is unclear what "orthodoxy" is? Perhaps "orthodoxy" means something different to everyone? One should be able to infer, then, that the other words in the "instructions" mean the same to everyone. Words like *creative*, *illuminating*, and *effective*, for example? This assumption doesn't seem to hold.

The problems of the group studying for this theological competence test exemplify the disturbing state of the church today. The students seek the standard of what they should write, and for answers they receive ambiguous terms like *creative*, *illuminating*, and *effective*. Likewise church members seek a standard of what they should believe, and they get the exact answers which were deemed competent by this test: *creative*, *illuminating*, and *effective*. The proclamation of the church is therefore as convoluted as these directions.

The entire orientation to the question should be reversed. At the heart of theological competence is the articulation of *orthodoxy*, namely, *right* or *true belief*. A competent theologian can tell a congregation what is right and what is true to believe, and moreover, from this competence only can speak truly creativity, can truly illuminate, and is truly effective. An incompetent sophist, on the other hand, can spin words to sound creative, illuminating, and effective, but cannot speak about what is right and what is true. This is not to say that it is easy to define orthodoxy. Indeed, it is very difficult to ar-

rive at the true and the right belief. But this is exactly the point. This should be the goal of theological education, and the standard for a test which seeks to assess a student's competence after completing that education.

This also happens to be the goal of the *Princeton Theological Review*. Leafing through this edition, one may think the inclusion of articles is rather . . . eclectic. There is a method to our madness. We believe the true and the right beliefs reside within the classic confessions of the Christian church (which the Competence Exam itself seems to recognize in some distorted way), and that the Reformed theological tradition faithfully articulates those views. We therefore include the articles by Reverend Carlos Wilton and Peter Heslam on Calvinism. We also affirm that these beliefs provide a fruitful perspective for addressing *creative* issues, such as music in popular culture. We therefore include the article by Vito Aiuto and Jeremy Dowsett on *Rage Against the Machine*. And the interview with Peter Brown? Hey, Peter Brown's erudition and humor need no justification. Just read the article.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The pTr editorial staff bids a fond farewell to Jay Richards and Elisabeth Kennedy. Jay is currently working at the Discovery Institute in Seattle. Elisabeth will continue on the Editorial Advisory Board during the last year of her M.Div. This year we welcome Matthew Koenig as General Editor, Scott Lumsden as Managing Editor, Matthew Frawley as Executive Editor, and Jim McCullough as Book Review Editor. We are also excited to welcome Rev. Earl Palmer to the Advisory Board, and we look forward to more pastors taking part in the *Review*.

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#### TO OUR READERS:

*The pTr is undergoing some exciting changes and we want to welcome students, alums and friends of the seminary to join in. We want to take this opportunity to invite any students who to are interested in writing, editing, interviewing, reviewing books, or learning about the pTr to become more involved. We would also like to make a special appeal to those in the pastorate to become more involved as well. The pTr is very interested in promoting and supporting those in the parish and would very much welcome not only your critique, but your articles and ideas for upcoming issues. The pTr is in its fifth year of serving the PTS community and it is our deep desire that Reformed dialogue, evangelical orthodoxy, and meaningful theological engagement might always find a home in its pages. If you would like to join our effort or have questions, please email, write, or call us at any of the addresses listed in the journal. Thanks for your consideration, we hope you enjoy this issue.*

*Sincerely,  
THE EDITORS*



# John Calvin's Theology of Ordination

Carlos E. Wilton

It is generally acknowledged that John Calvin did not set out — at least not initially — to found a new church. Fleeing France, Calvin did not intend to settle in Geneva and establish a new church and social order, but was constrained by Guillaume Farel to linger in that city and assist the work of reformation. For this reason, the first-generation church order of the Calvinist reform, created as it was amidst a crucible of change, demonstrates something of the same *ad hoc* quality as that of the first-century church.

Yet even so, it is possible to identify, in the Calvinist reform, an emerging theology of ordination to the office of minister of the word and sacrament. The foundational theme is that of *diakonia*, or servanthood.

My intention in this study is to trace the broad outline of Calvin's theology of ordination, focusing first on his foundational understanding of ministry as service to Jesus Christ, sustained by the Holy Spirit. Next, we will discuss some details of the actual ministerial order Calvin established in Geneva, based on these principles. Finally, we will consider two problems that emerge out of Calvin's theology of ordination that are significant for Reformed churches today: the tension between function and office, and the problem of biblical sources.

## *Lutheran Foundations of the Calvinist Reform*

Calvin is one of those rare figures in the history of the church who had the opportunity to reform both doctrine and ecclesiastical government. Already an accomplished scholar, Calvin was handed the opportunity, as he returned to Geneva from Strasbourg in 1541, to totally remake church government in that city. This he accomplished, in part, through the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, adopted by the General Council of the inhabitants of Geneva that same year. In the *Institutes*

and in his commentaries on scripture, we have the opportunity to observe the unfolding of Calvin's ecclesiology; in the *Ordinances* and other documents of a more practical vein, we have the opportunity to watch his theology becoming enfolded in the life and mission of the people of God.

Calvin's debt to Martin Luther and to other continental reformers is considerable: for by sweeping away the last vestiges of Roman church government, they cleared the decks for him to develop a new ministerial order, based on a fresh interpretation of the biblical and patristic sources.

Although Luther's followers would eventually develop a detailed theology of ordination, at first his view was radically reductionist and "low-church": ordination, in his words, is "nothing else than a certain rite of choosing preachers for the Church."<sup>1</sup> For Luther, the word of God is primary, and will endeavor by its own power to call up ministers to perform the work of proclamation.

The hallmark of the preaching ministry, as Luther sees it, is service:

My office, and that of every preacher and minister, does not consist in any sort of lordship but in serving all of you, so that you learn to know God, become baptized, have the true word of God, and finally are saved. Never do I claim worldly power; princes and lords, mayors and judges, are to establish and provide for that. My office is merely a service which I am to give to every-

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one freely and gratuitously, nor should I seek from it either money or goods, either honor or anything else.<sup>2</sup>

Consequently, Luther could advise his followers that any believer — in theory at least — is permitted to baptize or to celebrate the Lord's Supper. He advises midwives to baptize dying infants, and teaches that any believer may pronounce absolution for a brother or sister in the faith. Furthermore, in theory a Christian congregation can do without a structured ministry altogether; a hypothetical congregation stranded in the wilderness could choose its own minister, and be assured that the preacher they chose would have as much authority as any appointed by a bishop or pope.

The rite of the church that far eclipses ordination in importance, as far as Luther is concerned, is the sacrament of baptism. "Through baptism," he asserts in *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, "all of us are consecrated to the priesthood."<sup>3</sup> Luther's strongly functional theology of ordination is clearly seen in this passage from the same work:

For whoever comes out of the water of baptism can boast that he is already consecrated priest, bishop and pope, though it is not seemly that everyone should exercise the office.... Therefore a priest in Christendom is nothing else than an office-holder. While he is in office, he has precedence; when deposed, he is a peasant or a townsman like the rest.... From all this it follows that there is really no difference between laymen and priests, "spirituals" and "temporals," as they call them, except that of office and work...<sup>4</sup>

Luther would in time, modify this radically simple, functional view of ordination, especially as the Anabaptist defections became a problem for him. Yet even so, his viewpoint represents a clean break with Augustine's highly official view of ordination as conferring an "indelible mark" on the ordinand. Calvin built his theology of ordination on the foundation of the Lutheran reform.

#### *Ministry in Service to Jesus Christ*

In Calvin's ministerial order, *diakonia*, or servanthood, is the controlling paradigm. The single most important biblical paradigm for understanding ministry, the simple New Testament concept of *diakonia* gradually became subsumed, in the patristic period and continuing through the middle ages, under the highly official view that had been articulated by Augustine and others.<sup>5</sup>

With his trained legal mind, Calvin responded to the challenge left him by Luther and the other reformers who, in the first heady days of ecclesiastical rebellion, had followed Luther into the breach. Calvin's theology of ministry is built around the concept of ministry (or

service) of the word, which includes the central tasks of proclaiming the word and celebrating the sacraments. Unlike Luther, Calvin gives no indication that a structured ministry is to be handled warily, as a potential threat to the priesthood of all believers; on the contrary, he sees it as positively beneficial. Priesthood, for Calvin, is pre-eminently the prerogative of Jesus Christ, the one high priest; those who serve this high priest are servants or ministers of him, but not priests in their own right.

Calvin's theology of ordination proceeds directly from this pronounced focus on service to Jesus Christ.

Calvin is one of those rare figures in the history of the church who had the opportunity to reform both doctrine and ecclesiastical government.

Since Christ is the sole head of the church, no individual in the church can claim personal authority over the body; authority in the church belongs to the word alone, not to the person proclaiming it.<sup>6</sup> Calvin believes that this authority will arise out of the word itself. As Harro Höpfl summarizes Calvin's viewpoint, it is useless to speak of "rights" that pertain to ministers by virtue of their office:

Calvin's purpose throughout was not only to arm the ministry with formal rights, but also and more important to secure a ministry which, by its own high standards, self-discipline, and corporate solidarity, would have the kind of moral authority that is worth more than any quantity of formal rights.<sup>7</sup>

Ministry, in Calvin's understanding, is shared. There is a single ministry in the church, which manifests itself in several modes. Although hints of a similar concept of plural ministry can perhaps be discerned in some of Luther's writings, the German reformer did not develop it. The full development of the idea of plural ministry must be credited to Calvin, who in making it such a central feature of his system distances himself considerably from Luther.<sup>8</sup>

*Charismata* for ministry, while bestowed by the Spirit on individuals, are given not in order to create individual privilege, but for the upbuilding of the community as a whole; God's distribution of gifts never exalts particular individuals, but is rather an accommodation to human weakness, so the church may be equipped to serve as God's instrument in the world. As



the church is Christ's body, so its ministry must be as well-ordered as the human body; "decency and order" (1 Cor. 14:40) are always to be the standards for Christian ministry.<sup>9</sup>

### *Ministry Sustained By the Holy Spirit*

Not only does Calvin use Christological terms to describe the minister's role; he also relies on the Holy Spirit as an explanation for how ministry in the church comes to be, and how it is sustained.<sup>10</sup>

In order for ministers to speak with the voice of Christ, Calvin observes, they must have the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out upon them:

Because no mortal man is fit for such a difficult office....Christ institutes the apostles by the grace of his Spirit. And indeed, to govern the Church of God, to bear the embassy of eternal salvation, to set up God's kingdom on earth and to lift men to heaven is something far beyond human capacity. It is not surprising therefore that no man is found fit unless he is inspired...by the Holy Spirit. For nobody can speak one word about Christ unless the Spirit governs his tongue...<sup>11</sup>

The presence (or absence) of gifts of the Holy Spirit is always to be considered in judging the competence of a preacher:

...those whom Christ calls to the pastoral office...He also adorns with the necessary gifts, that they may be equal to discharging their duty, or at least may not come to it empty and naked....a sure rule is here laid down for judging the calling of those who preside over God's church — if we see the gifts of the Holy Spirit.<sup>12</sup>

This divine initiative calls forth a response on the part of the preacher. Ministers must do their part, approaching the homiletical task with diligent preparation. There is, Calvin says, a "joining [of] the power of [Christ's] Spirit with the activity of man."<sup>13</sup>

Yet as important as human effort is, it is of no avail if the minister has not first been "qualified" by the Spirit of God:

No man is fit to teach who has not first been qualified by God. This reminds all godly teachers to ask from the Spirit of God what otherwise they could not at all possess. They must indeed study diligently, so as not to ascend the pulpit till they have been fully prepared; but they must hold by this principle, that all things necessary for discharging their office are gifts of the Holy Spirit. And, indeed, if they were not organs of the Holy Spirit, it would be extreme rashness to come forth publicly in the name of God.<sup>14</sup>

The Holy Spirit's role in sustaining the church's ministry is especially important for Calvin's understanding

of the rite of ordination. Commenting on the ordination of deacons in Acts 6, Calvin calls the rite "a solemn symbol of consecration under the law."<sup>15</sup> The laying on of hands is always to be accompanied by prayer — for without prayer, the rite is "empty in itself." Calvin concludes that:

...the laying on of hands is a rite consistent with order and dignity, seeing that it was used by the apostles; not of course that it has any efficacy or virtue in itself, but its power and effect depend wholly on the Spirit of God. That must be the general opinion about all ceremonies.<sup>16</sup>

Ministers, in Calvin's schema, are servants of Jesus Christ, related to Christ as parts of the human body are related to the head. Yet they are also servants of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit has an important, and sometimes unheralded, role in calling, in ordination and in the effective exercise of ministry.

### *Calvin's Ministerial Order*

Unlike Luther, Calvin personally constructed a ministerial order which we can clearly observe. Lutheran ministerial order did not mature until the second generation of the reform, when under the influence of Melancthon and others church law was codified. Calvin, however, used his legally-trained mind to establish an actual church order in Geneva, contemporaneous with his theological work.

Calvin's Genevan ministerial order is fourfold, comprised of pastors, doctors, elders, and deacons. While he lists four discrete offices, in reality his ministerial order is comprised of only three functions, those belonging to pastors, elders, and deacons — for he

Calvin's theology of ministry is built around the concept of service of the Word, which includes the central tasks of proclaiming the Word, and celebrating the sacraments.

considers doctors' work to be a subdivision or specialty of the pastoral function.<sup>17</sup> It was not long after Calvin's time that the distinct order of doctor disappeared from the Reformed churches, subsumed under the order of pastor.<sup>18</sup> When this occurred, Reformed ministerial order became threefold in order as well as in function.



Furthermore, Calvin sees the offices of presbyter and pastor as being integrally related; two aspects of the same office. Since he also sees ample scriptural evidence for considering the words “bishop” and “presbyter” as functionally identical in the early church — an insight which John T. McNeill calls “a cardinal principal of Presbyterian polity” — we have in the *Institutes* the seeds of tremendous confusion for future generations who have sought, in Calvin, a single pattern of ministerial order that is both biblical and Reformed.

Twentieth-century Reformed theology must frankly acknowledge the limitations of Calvin's sixteenth-century worldview, and endeavor to construct a theology of ordination that is yet faithful to Calvin's vision of service of the Word.

While Calvin professes to see in the New Testament a single pattern of ministerial order — that of a pastor/bishop surrounded by presbyters — he does not in practice see that New Testament model as one to be slavishly emulated. Rather, he sees the New Testament vision of ministry as mission-driven, constructed for the sole purpose of bringing God's word to the people. As long as the word is proclaimed, the sacraments faithfully administered and discipline judiciously upheld, considerable flexibility is possible in the ways the church chooses to order its ministry.<sup>19</sup> While Calvin's ministerial order is official in insisting on a divinely called, popularly elected ministry of word and sacrament, it is functional in allowing a certain degree of flexibility for implementation.

#### *Qualifications of Ordained Leaders*

All those exercising public ministry in the church must, in Calvin's view, have both a valid call from a church and an approved field in which to exercise their ministry. This is consistent, in Calvin's mind, with the radical centrality of Christ's rule over the church — for as “the order by which God willed his church to be governed” and “the principal sinew by which the faithful are held together in one body,” ministry of the word is a direct instrument of Christ's rule over the church.<sup>20</sup>

No individual can hold the office which belongs to Christ alone — that is, high priesthood.

Pastors, in Calvin's scheme, have the responsibility “to proclaim the Word of God, to instruct, admonish, exhort, and censure, both in public and private, to administer the sacraments and to enjoin brotherly correction along with the elders and colleagues.”<sup>21</sup>

The marks of the order of pastor are the preaching of the word, the care of discipline, and the administration of the sacraments.<sup>22</sup> Pastors are to be selected by means of an examination of their doctrine and their faithfulness in Christian life, and are ordinarily to be ordained by the laying on of hands.<sup>23</sup>

#### *Calvin's Understanding of the Office of Minister*

Calvin's conception of the office of minister, as we have seen, is both functional and official. Like Luther, he sees ministry as constituted for one primary task: proclamation of the word. Throughout his writings, Calvin places great stress on the duties, functions and service of ministers; he resists any attempts to ascribe to the office, or to its occupants, facile honor, status or prestige.

Calvin has an extremely high regard for the function of preaching that is the central feature of this office:

[God] uses the ministry of men to declare openly his will to us by mouth, as a sort of delegated work, not by transferring to them his right and honor, but only that through their mouths he may do his own work — just as a workman uses a tool to do his work.<sup>24</sup>

Calvin sees the office of ministry of the word as a gift, an instance of God's condescension and accommodation to human beings in their fallen state. God could come into the world directly at any time, giving us the message in person; but instead God speaks to us in a human voice that is easier to accept.<sup>25</sup> We receive ministry as a divinely ordered *gift*. As Robert Clyde Johnson puts it:

We must not overlook, as Calvin did not, the kinship of the biblical words “grace” and “gift,” *charis* and *charismata*. If we speak accurately, we can say that Calvin held a “charismatic” view of the ministry; which is to say, he viewed the grace of God as both the originating and the continuing reality that makes possible any and all Christian ministry.<sup>26</sup>

As Calvin himself says in his commentary on Ephesians 4:11, bearing witness to the radical dependence of ministry on Jesus Christ:

...the government of the Church by the ministry of the Word is not contrived by men, but set up by the



Son of God...It is Himself who gave [ministers]; for if He does not raise them up, there will be none. Another inference is that no man will be fit or equal for so distinguished an office who has not been formed and made by Christ himself. That we have ministers of the Gospel is His gift; that they excel in necessary gifts is His gift; that they execute the trust committed to them, is likewise His gift.<sup>27</sup>

Wilhelm Pauck notes, on the subject of preaching, that the titles commonly used by churches of the Reformation (Lutheran as well as Calvinist) to describe ministers reflect this characteristic focus on preaching as the pre-eminent ministerial function. Although the reformers often use the word “pastor” (shepherd), Pauck notes, their preferred term is “preacher.” The German reformers also use the word *pfarrer*, which is related to *parochia* (or parish) and *parochus* (or parson). It was only in the eighteenth century, under the influence of pietism (especially in Lutheranism) that the word “pastor” came to the fore. The term “minister” is the contribution of Reformed churches, who — under Calvin’s influence — emphasize the role of the minister as *ministerium verbi divini*, “servant of the word of God.”<sup>28</sup>

Looking at the matter from another standpoint, from that of the minister rather than the worshiper, we come to the realization that the spirituality of the minister must necessarily be grounded in humility and servanthood. If the very call ministers have received is

Those whom Christ calls to the  
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it empty and naked.  
—John Calvin

grounded in God’s accommodation to a fallen world and in the humble realization that all is a free and graceful gift, then ministers will approach their tasks with appropriate awe and gratitude. The calling of ministers, in Calvin’s understanding, is but one aspect of God’s ongoing work of redemption.

Ministry, then, is more than merely a convenience, one option among many through which people may learn of the gospel; it is essential to the health of the church. Ministry is “the chief sinew by which believers

are held together in one body...For neither the light and heat of the sun, nor food and drink, are so necessary to nourish and sustain the present life as the apostolic and pastoral office is necessary to preserve the church on earth.”<sup>29</sup> In using such effusive terms, Calvin clearly goes beyond a definition of ministry as merely functional; he sees it instead as a divinely established office.

### *The Calling and Ordination of Ministers*

It is essential, Calvin teaches, that ministers be *called* to their task. Calling, for him, has two components, an “outward and solemn call” and an inner or “secret call.”<sup>30</sup> The calling of church leaders is always to take place with the utmost “religious awe,” with fasting and with prayers.<sup>31</sup> Calvin quotes both scripture and the writings of Cyprian as evidence for the practice of the people of God electing their own ministers.<sup>32</sup>

As for the act of ordination itself, Calvin seems not to have developed a clear theology. In two places in the *Institutes*, he comes close to considering it a sacrament.<sup>33</sup> Yet elsewhere he declares that he has not named it as a sacrament, “because it is not ordinary and common with all believers, but is a special rite for a particular office.”<sup>34</sup>

Calvin rejects any understanding of ordination as conferring an “indelible mark.” He also repudiates any view of the laying on of hands as transmitting the Holy Spirit in any instrumental sense. Remarking on how the risen Christ breathed the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, Calvin derides the Roman bishops’ claim that their hands convey the Holy Spirit at ordination:

By this symbol [our Lord] represented the power of the Holy Spirit, which he gave them. These good men have retained this insufflation, and, as if they are putting forth the Holy Spirit from their throat, they mutter over those whom they are making priestlings, “Receive the Holy Spirit”....If they try to do this, they rival God and all but challenge him in a contest, but are very far from being effective, and by their inept gesture do nothing but mock Christ. Indeed, they are so shameless as to dare affirm that they confer the Holy Spirit. But how true that is, experience teaches, which cries out that all those who are consecrated as priests are turned from horses into asses, from fools into madmen. Nevertheless, it is not over this that I have a quarrel with them. I am only condemning the ceremony itself...<sup>35</sup>

Neither does Calvin permit the Roman practice of ordaining ministers who do not have a particular pastoral charge. This is for two reasons: to save the church unnecessary expense, and to insure that “those ordained are not to think themselves promoted to an honor but charged with an office.”<sup>36</sup>

To Calvin, the laying on of hands has special signifi-



cance to the person being ordained, for it “warns the one ordained that he is no longer a law unto himself, but bound in servitude to God and the church.”<sup>37</sup> Calvin appreciates the potent symbolism of the rite — but, since he sees no “set precept” in scripture declaring how it is to be administered, he declines to issue precise rubrics for ordination (and, as we have seen, chooses not to use the laying on of hands at all in the Genevan church, because of the potential for misunderstanding). Calvin is most concerned here not with the rite of ordination itself, but with its underlying symbolism. “It will be no empty sign,” he predicts, “if it is restored to its own true origin.”<sup>38</sup>

### *The Tension Between Function and Office*

We now turn to the first of three problems arising out of Calvin’s theology of ministry: an inherent tension in his thought between ministry as function and ministry as office.

Far from perceiving in scripture a rigid organizational scheme and imposing it on the contemporary church, Calvin sees a cluster of functions that must be carried on in the church in one form or another. As he looks to the New Testament and the patristic documents, Calvin identifies church offices that he is able to commend as fulfilling those functions. Yet he is flexible enough to realize that there are sometimes varied ways in which the church can order itself, and still achieve the same results.

For all his reliance on scripture, Calvin still does not identify anywhere in the Bible a precise blueprint for ministerial order. God’s desire, as he sees it, is that certain ministerial functions be preserved; the particular vessel in which the function is housed is a matter of relative indifference. In the *Institutes*, for example, Calvin makes mention of certain offices such as prophet and evangelist which are no longer in currency, but which the Lord may yet choose to raise up “at a later period...as has happened in our own day.”<sup>39</sup> On a number of occasions, when deriding the unfaithfulness of the Roman clergy of his time, Calvin concedes that many Roman ecclesiastical practices are not corrupt in themselves, but merely misused. He is not even averse, in principle, to a separate ecclesiastical office of bishop — provided such bishops exercise rule in a true and faithful fashion.<sup>40</sup> He acknowledges also that many of the names used in scripture to identify church offices are interchangeable.<sup>41</sup>

Although Calvin’s approach to particular ministerial offices is functional, he demonstrates something of an official view when it comes to ministry in general. The particular manifestations of ministerial office are open to negotiation, but there is no question for

him that the church needs an ordained ministry of some sort. Ministry is “an inviolable ordinance, proceeding from God.”<sup>42</sup> Whoever undermines the ministry plots the destruction of the church.<sup>43</sup>

Calvin is no ecclesiastical anarchist. Distrusting “the passions of the common people” and fearing “the anarchical disorder that must soon follow when every man is allowed to do as he likes,” Calvin lauds a structured ministry as a manifestation of the divine order on earth.<sup>44</sup> In this sense, he demonstrates an official view of ministry. “The authority of rulers [in the church],” he writes, “is therefore a bridle necessary to maintain order in the church.”<sup>45</sup>

The calling of ministers, in Calvin’s understanding, is but one aspect of God’s ongoing work of redemption.

Calvin even employs the medieval theological distinction between the clergy as the “soul” of the church and the laity as its “body.”<sup>46</sup> As Höpfl puts it:

He positively approved hierarchy as a means to decency and good order in the church; his sole concern was with excluding *primatus* and *dominium* of one minister over others. The ministry must be collegial. And the history of the Roman church...was precisely a melancholy and lamentable story of the deterioration of the intrinsically sound arrangement of a presidency ultimately subject to the ministerial college, into a corrupt anti-Christian tyranny of one over all the earth.<sup>47</sup>

So emphatic is Calvin on this point that it is possible to charge him with neglecting the signal reformation doctrine of the priesthood of all believers; indeed, he makes little room in his theological or ecclesiastical system for the vocation of ordinary Christians.<sup>48</sup>

Höpfl cites an excerpt from a January, 1539 letter to Pignaeus, in which Calvin objects that his antagonists “involve themselves and the whole business in miserable confusion, as long as they do not distinguish between the minister and the private member [of the church].”<sup>49</sup> In March, 1539, Calvin wrote to Farel, recounting some discussions he had recently had in Frankfurt:

...the first thing that made them angry was that I was distinguishing between the minister and the people, and was asserting the former to be a steward, in whom



prudence and fidelity are required. From private persons less is asked, ...<sup>50</sup>

Calvin's clericalism is perhaps surprising, in light of Luther's strong conviction that the word of God itself will raise up preachers to proclaim it; but Calvin is a very different sort of theologian. He writes from a time and place in which the maintenance of ecclesiastical order is an overriding issue; his task in Geneva, as he sees it, is not to challenge an existing order, but to build a new one founded on biblical principles.<sup>51</sup>

There is, then, a tension present in Calvin's writings on ministry. On the one hand is his conviction that the *functions* of ministry — the tasks of proclaiming the word, celebrating the sacraments and administering ecclesiastical discipline — are of overriding importance. On the other hand, there is Calvin's conviction that the *office* of ministry — particularly the preaching ministry — is of the essence of the church.

The government of the Church by the ministry of the Word is not contrived by men. That we have ministers of the Gospel is His gift; that they excel in necessary gifts is His gift; that they execute the trust committed to them, is likewise His gift.  
—John Calvin

Perhaps a way to resolve the tension, or at least to live with it, is by utilizing an image suggested by Thomas F. Torrance of the minister as steward. The image comes from Calvin's commentary on Matthew 21:23, whose words Torrance quotes as follows:

...while God appoints pastors over his church, he does not convey His right to others, but acts in the same manner as if a proprietor were to let a vineyard or field to a husbandman, who would labour in the cultivation of it and make an annual return.<sup>52</sup>

Central to Calvin's theology of ordination is the notion of stewardship. As stewards, pastors are servants of God, exercising *diakonia* in the "vineyard" to which they have been called. The office of ministry of the word is essential to the church, but only insofar as the

officeholders are faithful in their service (in other words, as long as they faithfully perform the *functions* of ministry). Stewardship, in other words, is the unifying concept that makes it possible for Calvin to hold both a functional and an official view of ministry.

### *Calvin's Use of the Biblical Sources*

The second problem we must consider is Calvin's approach to the biblical material.

Calvin's perception of the scriptural mandate for his Genevan ministerial order is demonstrated in Book IV of the *Institutes*. From his late-medieval frame of reference — uninformed as he inevitably was about modern theories of dating and authorship of New Testament books and the insights of higher criticism — Calvin generalizes from the witness of a few biblical books to draw conclusions concerning the practices of the whole New Testament church.<sup>53</sup> "I approve only those human constitutions," he writes, "which are founded upon God's authority, drawn from scripture, and, therefore, wholly divine."<sup>54</sup> He sees the early church as monolithic in structure, universally subject to the rule of councils of presbyters.<sup>55</sup>

According to his view of church history, the early church began as a loose organization of Christians, gathered around the apostles who proclaimed the gospel. As the community grew and the apostolic era drew to a close, it became necessary to designate one person in each community to proclaim the word and celebrate the sacraments. This person — the "minister" or "bishop" (the terms are for Calvin interchangeable) — functioned according to authority delegated by the community as a whole.<sup>56</sup> The council of presbyters, who were gathered around the bishop, functioned in a similar fashion as they engaged in administrative oversight of the local church, as did the deacons in their dual function of managing alms distribution and performing ministries of sympathy and service. It was only later, in Calvin's view, that the church ascribed authority to individuals personally, as it developed the doctrine of apostolic succession by episcopal ordination. It is these later developments — and not the original biblical-historical pattern, which he believes can readily be recovered — that Calvin advises purging from the church.<sup>57</sup>

Calvin's approach to scripture is troubling to many in the late twentieth century. In his exegetical method, he is very much a product of his times, and it is difficult for modern observers to place themselves within his intellectual frame of reference. As McKee observes, however, it would be just as difficult for sixteenth-century Christians to accept some of the assumptions which modern scholars receive without question:



The things which most shock twentieth-century scholars, such as the idea of Rom. 12:6-8 as a series of New Testament offices, or the conclusion that some offices in Eph. 4:11 and 1 Cor. 12:28 were temporary and others permanent, were not in fact upsetting or even startlingly novel to Calvin's contemporaries, though how Bucer and Calvin chose to argue from these ideas probably was so. On the other hand, ideas which post-Enlightenment thinkers accept naturally, for example "lay" ecclesiastical offices or the distinguishing in principle (at least, if not necessarily in practice) between offices of the church and those of Christian society, appeared unprecedented and dismaying in the sixteenth century.<sup>58</sup>

Still, we have no other alternative than to acknowledge that Calvin is simply wrong in his exegetical approach, and therefore in the conclusions he draws from scripture about first-century ministerial order. The New Testament church did not have a universally recognized fourfold order of ministry, of the sort Calvin believes himself to be replicating in Geneva; there was in fact little uniformity among the first-century churches in the way they ordered their ecclesiastical life. The solution to this problem, for twentieth-century Reformed theology, is to frankly acknowledge the limitations of Calvin's sixteenth-century worldview, and to endeavor to construct a theology of ordination that is yet faithful to Calvin's vision of service of the word. Such a theology of ordination will seek its justification not in its congruence with a first-century organizational chart (indeed, if one could be found to exist), but rather in faithfulness to Jesus' radical call to *diakonia*.

### Conclusion

We began this study with a brief look at Luther's theology of ordination, seeing how he defines a functional understanding of ministry in opposition to the official, "indelible-mark" theology that had come down from Augustine. Luther demonstrates no particular sense of urgency when it comes to codifying ordination practice; for him, it is calling, rather than ordination, that is at the heart of the matter. There are tasks to be fulfilled in the church, and Luther trusts the Holy Spirit to raise up leaders to fulfill those functions.

Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is central to his understanding of ministry. For this reason, baptism is for him far more important than ordination; every baptized Christian is, to Luther's way of thinking, a minister.

Calvin, on the other hand, as a reformer charged with developing actual forms of church government, is necessarily more concerned than Luther with the establishment and codification of ecclesiastical practice. His view of ministry tends to be more official than

Luther's. Yet even so, Calvin's conception of ministry is just as firmly founded as Luther's on the New Testament concept of *diakonia*, or service, to Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Like the apostle Paul, Calvin demonstrates a charismatic and communal understanding of ministry. Ministry arises from the call and work of the Holy Spirit, and ministry is shared. Calvin understands the *charismata* for ministry as having been given for the upbuilding of the entire community. So "high" is Calvin's conception of the church, and of its ministry, that at times his understanding of ordination borders on the sacramental.

Three particular problems arise from Calvin's theology of ordination. First, there is a tension between Calvin's sometimes-functional and sometimes-official concept of ministry. The solution to this tension may be found in his image of the minister as steward. As stewards of the *charismata* necessary for proclaiming the word and celebrating the sacraments, ministers are servants of the Lord. As long as servanthood is kept at the fore, Calvin's theology of ministry avoids the pitfalls of excessive clericalism.

Second, we have seen how Calvin's exegetical method leads him to see a degree of uniformity in first-century ministerial order that, as modern scholarship has revealed, simply is not there; this results in a sometimes-surprising clericalism.<sup>59</sup> Modern-day Reformed theologians, building on the heritage of Calvin, do well to remind themselves of the limitations of his exegetical method. The third problem has to do with the way Calvin interchanges the terms "presbyter," "pastor" and "bishop." This results in a terminological confusion that makes it difficult for Reformed ministerial offices to be translated intelligibly into the language of other Christian ecclesiastical traditions.

For all his limitations, however, Calvin continues to be the single most significant theological influence, after scripture itself, on the Reformed understanding of ministry. Certain aspects of his thought are bound to the sixteenth century, but his overall vision of ministry as radical servanthood to Jesus Christ remains fresh and compelling: the gift of the Reformed churches to the church universal.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, trans. A.T.W. Steinhaeuser, in *Works of Martin Luther*, vol. II (Philadelphia: Holman, 1916), p. 279.

<sup>2</sup>"Sermon on Matthew 20:24-28, 1537," quoted in *What Luther Says*, ed. E. Plass (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959) vol. 2, pp. 923-924.

<sup>3</sup>P. 66.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 68-69.



<sup>5</sup>I trace these developments in chapters one and two of the previously cited *As One Who Serves: Diakonia As a Paradigm For Ordination*.

<sup>6</sup>*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), IV.3.2.; IV.8.2. T.F. Torrance, in *Kingdom and Church* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1956) attributes Calvin's reluctance to ascribe official (as opposed to functional) authority to the minister to his thoroughgoing awareness of sin. For God to be active in the preaching of the word is for God to descend to our level, in an incarnational sense: "This clothing of the Word in our contemptible language is for Calvin part of the whole humiliation of the Word or the Son on the Cross, so that the preaching of this same Word, which is thus the Word of the Cross, makes foolish the wisdom of the world" (p. 127). For more on Calvin's belief that God can use even deficient people to preach the word, in order to accommodate to human sin, see also R.S. Wallace, *Calvin on the Word and Sacrament* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1953), pp. 117-118.

<sup>7</sup>*The Christian Polity of John Calvin* (Cambridge: that ministers be elected by the community. By "election," however, Calvin does not understand a choice by popular vote, but rather by an elite body, such as the consistory. "No one must be elected," he says, "who is not of sound doctrine and of saintly life" (*Institutes* IV.3.12).

<sup>8</sup>See Elsie McKee, *John Calvin On the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1984), p. 133.

<sup>9</sup>*Institutes* IV.3.10. For Calvin, it is indispensable that ministers be elected by the community.

<sup>10</sup>Brian Armstrong, "The Role of the Holy Spirit in Calvin's Teaching On the Ministry," in *Calvin and the Holy Spirit: Papers and Responses Presented at the Sixth Colloquium On Calvin and Calvin Studies Sponsored By the Calvin Studies Society* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Calvin Studies Society, 1989), pp. 99-113, makes the point that Calvin's reliance on the Holy Spirit as a foundation for ministry has not received as much scholarly attention as his Christological focus. Armstrong attributes this to the fact that Calvin does not have much to say on this subject in the *Institutes*, although he does mention it frequently in his commentaries and sermons.

<sup>11</sup>*The Gospel According to St. John and the First Epistle of John*, 2 vols., trans. T.H.L. Parker, in *Calvin's Commentaries* ed. David W. and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959-61), vol. 2, p. 4 (John 11:10).

<sup>12</sup>*The Gospel According to St. John*, vol. 2, p. 205 (John 20:22).

<sup>13</sup>*The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, trans. T.H.L. Parker, in *Calvin's Commentaries*, ed. David W. and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), p. 83 (Galatians 4:19).

<sup>14</sup>*Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, 4 vols., trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), vol. 4, pp. 52-53 (Isaiah 50:4).

<sup>15</sup>*The Acts of the Apostles 1-13*, trans. John W. Fraser and W.J.G. MacDonald (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1965), p. 163.

<sup>16</sup>*The Acts of the Apostles 1-13*, p. 163.

<sup>17</sup>This is the case, as Benjamin Milner points out in *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), pp. 145ff., because for Calvin all pastors are necessarily teachers, but not all teachers are pastors. In actual practice and celebration of the sacraments; the elevation of discipline as the third mark is properly credited to Calvin's disciple John Knox. The concept of ecclesiastical discipline is visible enough in Calvin's writings, however, for us to declare that for him it is essential to the church's well-being.

<sup>18</sup>Robert W. Henderson, *The Teaching Office in the Reformed Tradition* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962) is the leading study of the order of doctor in the Reformed churches.

<sup>19</sup>Calvin does not explicitly identify discipline as a third "mark of the church," alongside proclamation of the word and celebration of the sacraments; the elevation of discipline as the third mark is properly credited to Calvin's disciple John Knox. The concept of ecclesiastical discipline is visible enough in Calvin's writings, however, for us to declare that for him it is essential to the church's well-being.

<sup>20</sup>Ministry in Calvin's view is "a sort of delegated work" of God — *Institutes* IV.3.1-2. In his "Summary of Doctrine Concerning the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments," in *Calvin: Theological*

*Treatises*, ed. J.K.S. Reid, pp. 172-173, Calvin speaks of two ministries: the "external" minister who is the human being, and the "internal" minister who is the Holy Spirit.

<sup>21</sup>"Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances," p. 58. In the *Institutes*, Calvin subsumes these three functions under the two of proclaiming the word and celebrating the sacraments. "Private admonitions" (discipline) here becomes a subcategory of "proclaiming the gospel," which also includes "public discourses."

<sup>22</sup>*Institutes* IV.5.10. These correspond to the Reformed marks of the church, if we include discipline along with the two classical marks of word and sacrament. In Calvin's view it is crucial for the tasks of preaching and the celebration of the sacraments to be carried out by one person — for this a symbol of the basic Reformed principle that sacraments without the word are superstition, and the word without the sacraments is empty.

<sup>23</sup>Calvin recommends the laying on of hands as having the weight of tradition behind it, but counsels that the ceremony should be avoided in any situation in which there is a danger of it leading to superstition. See "The Necessity of Reforming the Church," pp. 209-210, and "Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances," p. 59. Wendel attributes Calvin's reluctance to recommend the laying on of hands to pressure from the authorities in Geneva, who wanted uniformity with Bernese practice (p. 71). Calvin makes no mention of the ordination of elders or deacons in the "Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances," speaking only of the proper procedure for their election.

<sup>24</sup>*Institutes* IV.3.1. Calvin maintains that God could do the work of proclamation without resorting to human assistance, but chooses this delegated means to "declare his regard for" humanity, to humble us (as we see how God sometimes chooses even "those of lower worth than we"), and to strengthen the bonds of our common fellowship.

<sup>25</sup>See Calvin's commentary on Eph. 4:12 in *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, p. 180. In his Sermon no. 43 on Deut. 5:23-27, Calvin says, "...if [God] spoke to us in his own majesty, or sent some angel to appear unto us, we would be the better touched, and all the world would be converted by and by, and every man obey without gain-saying or rebelling; but we know not what is for our own benefit....For if we look upon our own frailty, it is not possible that God should make us feel his power, but it should be to our utter undoing and destruction....God intends our welfare and salvation, in showing us his will by the mouth of men, when he ordains and appoints them to be ministers of his word, to bring us such message as he knows to be for our benefit." — *Sermons of John Calvin On the Fifth Book of Moses Called Deuteronomy*, trans. Arthur Golding (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, facsimile reprint of 1583 edition, 1987), p. 254.

<sup>26</sup>"Reformation and the Ministry," in *The Church and Its Changing Ministry, Study Material Prepared Under the Direction of the General Assembly Special Committee on the Nature of the Ministry* (Philadelphia: Office of the General Assembly, 1961), p. 61.

<sup>27</sup>*The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, p. 178.

<sup>28</sup>"The Ministry in the Time of the Continental Reformation," in *The Ministry in Historical Perspectives*, ed. Niebuhr and Williams, p. 116.

<sup>29</sup>*Institutes* IV.3.2. Preaching is, in fact, the distinguishing mark of the church: "Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists" (IV.1.9).

<sup>30</sup>*Institutes* IV.3.11. Calvin is reluctant to comment further on the secret call, "of which each minister is conscious before God, and which does not have the church as witness." The absence of further discussion in the *Institutes* of the secret call is not evidence of lack of interest on Calvin's part; since the purpose of the *Institutes* is to provide a working theological manual for the organizational church, further discussion of such a personal and spiritual matter does not have a place in that work, nor in the even more organizationally-delimited *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*.

<sup>31</sup>*Institutes* IV.3.12.

<sup>32</sup>*Institutes* IV.3.13-15. He cites Titus 1:5, 1 Timothy 5:22, Acts 1:15ff., 6:2-7, 14:23, and Cyprian, *Letters* lxvii.4.



<sup>33</sup>"I would not go against calling the laying on of hands, by which ministers of the church are initiated into their office, a sacrament, but I do not include it among the ordinary sacraments." (IV.14.20); "There remains the laying on of hands. As I concede that it is a sacrament in true and lawful ordinations, so I deny that it has a place in this farce [the use of oil to anoint a priest at a Roman ordination]" (IV.19.31). In "The True Method of Giving Peace to Christendom and Reforming the Church," in *Tracts and Treatises In Defense of the Reformed Faith*, vol. III, trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1851), p. 291, Calvin objects not so much to the view that ordination is a sacrament, but to its wide use in the Roman church to initiate people to a variety of offices: "The Laying On of Hands, by which Ministers are consecrated to their office, I do not quarrel with them for calling it a Sacrament. But that this appellation should be applied to what they call the seven orders, as they have hitherto been received in the Papacy...I hold to be not at all agreeable to reason."

<sup>34</sup>*Institutes* IV.19.28. Höpfl, in *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, p. 261, n. 21, notes that Calvin here is not being true to his own definition of a sacrament. This universal availability criterion is part neither of Calvin's short definition of a sacrament as "an external ceremony appointed by God to confirm a promise" (IV.19.34), nor of his expanded definition in IV.12.1.

<sup>35</sup>*Institutes* IV.19.29.

<sup>36</sup>*Institutes* IV.5.4.

<sup>37</sup>*Institutes* IV.3.16.

<sup>38</sup>*Institutes* IV.3.16.

<sup>39</sup>IV.3.4. It is McNeill's view that Calvin is referring to Luther here (n. 4).

<sup>40</sup>*Institutes* IV.5.11.

<sup>41</sup>*Institutes* IV.3.8.

<sup>42</sup>Sermon no. 43 on Deuteronomy 5:23-27, in *Sermons of John Calvin on the Fifth Book of Moses Called Deuteronomy*, p. 258.

<sup>43</sup>*Institutes* IV.3.2. In his own way, Calvin is just as emphatic in identifying ministers with the *esse* of the church as is Ignatius in so identifying bishops.

<sup>44</sup>Commentary on John 7:47 in *Calvin's Commentaries: The Gospel According to St. John*, trans. T.H.L. Parker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), p. 202.

<sup>45</sup>Commentary on John 7:47, in *Calvin's Commentaries: The Gospel According to St. John*, p. 202.

<sup>46</sup>Commentary on Jeremiah 31:14, cited by William J. Bouwsma, "The Legacy of John Calvin for the Ministry of the Reformed Church," in *Ministry in the Life of the Reformed Church Today: Papers Presented At a Colloquium in Honor of John Haddon Leith*, ed. Charles E. Raynal (Davidson, North Carolina: Davidson College Presbyterian Church, 1991), p. 220.

<sup>47</sup>*The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, p. 110.

<sup>48</sup>On Calvin and the priesthood of all believers, see Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, trans. Harold Knight (London: Lutterworth, 1956), pp. 202-203. See also Killian McDonnell, "Roman Catholicism and Calvin's Ecclesiological Transcendentalism," in *Reformed and Presbyterian World*, vol. XXIX, no. 4, Dec. 1966, pp. 161ff. See also Paul Avis, *The Church in the Theology of the Reformers* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981) p. 96. The question of whether Calvin ever affirmed the priesthood of all believers is one that has troubled scholars for centuries. It is said that the American theologian Albert Outler regularly offered a prize of one hundred dollars to any one of his students who could discover an explicit endorsement of the doctrine in any of Calvin's writings; the prize was never collected. William J. Bouwsma, in *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford, 1988), p. 219, asserts that "though he did not directly challenge the doctrine, Calvin did not subscribe to Luther's priesthood of all believers."

<sup>49</sup>*The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, p. 99, citing *Calvini Opera* 10,II,309.

<sup>50</sup>*The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, p. 99, citing *Calvini Opera* 10,II,323. Calvin makes a similar point in *Institutes* IV.12.1, in which he divides the church into "two chief orders: clergy and people," and speaks not only of a "common discipline" belonging to all Christians, but also of a special discipline belonging to the clergy.

<sup>51</sup>As T.F. Torrance summarizes Calvin's view, "Until Christ comes the Church is engaged in warfare and her weapon is the Word of God, for it is through the majesty of the Word that disorder is

subdued to order, and the deformed state of the Church is reformed to conformity with Christ" — *Kingdom and Church*, p. 136.

<sup>52</sup>*Kingdom and Church*, p. 132.

<sup>53</sup>Höpfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, p. 260, n. 16, cites the following examples of Calvin's misuse of scripture, which he calls "strained interpretation": his treatment of 2 Cor. 4:6 in *Institutes* IV.3.3, which does not demonstrate that ministers can be seen as "governing"; the rather contrived distinction between "permanent" and "temporary" offices in IV.3.4-5; the interpretation of 1 Cor. 12:28 and Romans 12:8 as proving the existence in the Pauline churches of a college of elders (IV.3.8, IV.2.1); the assertion that first-century ministers were the choice of the whole church, despite evidence in the pastorals that they were sometimes individually appointed (IV.3.15); the argument from silence against monarchical rule in the church, based on Paul's failure in Eph. 4:4-5 to mention a pope (IV.6.10). Höpfl says earlier, "This is not, of course, to say that Calvin was consciously distorting Scripture to make it fit a preconceived pattern, or that Calvin's view of the Church owed nothing to Scripture. It is, however, to say that Calvin's reading of the ecclesiastical polity of Scripture itself owes a great deal to a theology and ecclesiology which are by no means exclusively scriptural, contrary to Calvin's own view" (pp. 107-108). Another useful work is Elsie McKee's *Elders and the Plural Ministry: The Role of Exegetical History in Illuminating John Calvin's Theology* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1988), a most careful and intricate study of Calvin's exegetical methods with regard to orders of ministry. On pp. 63ff., McKee describes how Calvin practices selective exegesis in elevating the function of "administrators" higher than the other ministries in 1 Cor. 12:28 (healers, helpers and speakers in tongues), a practice she sees as typical of medieval exegesis.

<sup>54</sup>*Institutes* IV.10.30.

<sup>55</sup>Yet even Calvin recognizes a certain diversity of expression in the New Testament, making reference to the interchangeability of the terms "bishop," "presbyter," "pastor," and "minister" in scripture — *Institutes* IV.3.8. It did not apparently occur to him that this interchangeability might have a very simple explanation — namely that there were a variety of ministerial orders among the churches of the New Testament.

<sup>56</sup>*Institutes* IV.4.2.

<sup>57</sup>*Institutes* IV.III.9.; IV.IV.1-3, 5, 10-11; IV.V.1-2.

<sup>58</sup>*Elders and the Plural Ministry*, p. 222. In *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving*, pp. 145-146, McKee explains Calvin's willingness to consider "lay" ordination as arising out of a fundamental change in worldview. At the time Roman Catholic sacramental theology was being codified, most theologians assumed a sharp distinction between the "sacred" and the "profane." Ordination belonged to the sacred realm; it was the setting-apart of a person to perform sacred duties. By Calvin's time, the notion of the profane had been largely replaced by the idea of the "temporal." This led to a redefinition of ordination, whereby ordination to social ministries (as in Calvin's deacons) became a possibility.

<sup>59</sup>See Chapter One, "Biblical Roots of Ordination," in my more comprehensive study, *As One Who Serves: Diakonia As a Paradigm For Ordination...* (previously cited).



# The Meeting of the Wellsprings: Kuyper and Warfield at Princeton

Peter Heslam

*This year marks the centenary of the presentation of the Stone Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary by the Dutch theologian and politician Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920). A conference to mark this occasion was held at Princeton earlier this year, entitled 'Religion, Pluralism, and Public Life: Abraham Kuyper's Legacy for the 21st Century'. One of the speakers was Dr. Peter S. Heslam, whose recently published book, Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism (Eerdmans/Paternoster, 1998), was publicly presented at the conference. What follows is the text of his address.*

It is Princeton that has given us the essential Kuyper. Anyone seeking to discover the core of Kuyper's thought is best advised first to go to the Kuyper of Princeton, rather than to the Kuyper of Amsterdam or The Hague. Princeton is also chiefly responsible for Kuyper's international fame, secured in particular through the efforts of one of its most eminent theologians, Benjamin Warfield (1851-1921). Not only did Warfield have a hand in Kuyper's invitation to deliver the Stone Lectures, but he was intimately involved in the translation, publication and distribution of Kuyper's work in the English-speaking world. In doing so, he repeatedly expressed his admiration for his Dutch colleague, and commended him enthusiastically to new readers. This may seem odd in view of the fact that these two theologians represent different sources of inspiration – different 'wellsprings' – in contemporary evangelical thought and reflection. As George Marsden has written: "In almost every field today, evangelical scholars are divided in two camps [...] the Warfieldians and the Kuyperians." The key differences between Kuyper and Warfield were derived, however, from their difference in approach to a single issue: the relation-

ship between faith and reason. This is to be fully acknowledged, alongside a recognition of the importance of this issue, if an over-exaggerated picture either of their differences or of their similarities is to be avoided.

In the few paragraphs I have, I wish to focus on that moment in history when the two inspirational wellsprings came together at Princeton, and take a brief look at its legacy. Central to this are the Stone Lectures themselves, and it is here that we are introduced to the essential Kuyper. There are at least four factors that account for this. First, the Lectures represent a summary of Kuyper's thought, the components of which he had developed over the quarter-century of his public career that had passed before his visit to the United States. Despite their modest length, therefore, the Lectures have a broad scope – they represent a kind of 'manifesto' of his thought. The Lectures were presented, second, at the highpoint of Kuyper's career. When he gave them he was Professor of Theology, Member of Parliament, leader of the Anti-Revolutionary Party, and Chief Editor of his daily newspaper *De Standaard*. Three years later he became Prime Minister of the Netherlands. The Kuyper of the Stone Lectures, therefore, is Kuyper at the peak of his intellectual and organizational powers – it is Kuyper in his prime. Third, because in the Stone Lectures Kuyper made an attempt to relate his ideas to a foreign audience that was unfamiliar with them, allusions to debates and struggles particular to the Dutch context are kept to a minimum, thus allowing attention to focus on the underlying principles of his thought. Last, it was in the Stone Lectures that Kuyper seized on the concept of worldview in the specific sense

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of *Weltanschauung* as a way of giving shape to his entire body of thought. This is not to deny that certain aspects of his worldview concept are evident in his thinking before 1898, but where these occur there is no systematic application of the concept to opposing ideologies, and no attempt is made to define the contours of a Calvinistic worldview. The transition to the full use of the worldview concept as the central and dominant feature of Kuyper's thought was largely due, in fact, to the influence of the Scottish theologian James Orr, whose Kerr Lectures for 1890-91 Kuyper read in preparation for his Stone Lectures. Kuyper's employment of the concept at Princeton reflected his need to find a means of presenting the core of his ideas in a comprehensive and systematic way to an audience that was unfamiliar with them, and in doing so to emphasize their contemporary relevance and dynamic potential. What ensued is the most complete, cogent and visionary expression of Kuyper's thought that is available to any reader. It is not surprising, therefore, that it is this work amongst Kuyper's extensive repertoire that has had the greatest international rapport and impact.

But what of Kuyper's reception when he visited Princeton? Against a background of excitement and anticipation, a certain degree of irritation emerged shortly before he arrived. Only ten days before his lectures were due to begin, Kuyper sent Warfield the manuscripts of his Lectures with the request that they be translated afresh from the Dutch following amendments he had made to them on board ship *en route* to the United States and in the public library in Manhattan. In exasperated tones Warfield recorded the haste with which this request was fulfilled, and added that Kuyper's attempts to improve the English of the completed version had the effect of "waning it sadly." Exasperation made way for bewilderment after Kuyper arrived. In the conferment ceremony of honorary doctorates at the university, Kuyper was accompanied in the procession by the Oxford professor of English law Albert V. Dicey (1835-1922), who along with Kuyper was due to receive an honorary doctorate in law. Both candidates were called upon to address the audience. In a letter to his wife Dicey conveyed his impressions:

It is Princeton that has given us the essential Kuyper. The Kuyper of the Stone Lectures, therefore is Kuyper at the peak of his intellectual and organizational powers — it is Kuyper in his prime.

On the platform were the President and other University officers. Distinguished visitors, such as the ex-President of Cleveland, and the recipients of degrees, viz. Dr. Kuyper and myself. It was a bright, gay scene, but in some ways oddly unlike the giving of degrees at Oxford.[...] We were each asked to say a few words. This led to the most remarkable speech I have heard for a long time. Kuyper [...] looked like a Dutchman of the seventeenth century. He spoke slowly and solemnly. His English was impressive, with here and there a Dutch idiom. He told us he was a Calvinist; that he had been persecuted by anti-Calvinists — this itself sounded like the language of another age. All the good in America had its root in Calvinism, which was

as much a legal and an ethical as a religious creed.[...] Neither England nor the United States would have been free but for Dutch heroism [against Spanish tyranny]. This was the tone of the whole speech.[...] One felt as if the seventeenth century

had visibly risen upon us to give the last curse to Spain. After that I spoke [but] said nothing very remarkable [...] Then luncheon and a sort of *levée* - infinite handshakings and introductions. My head whirled over it.[...] This is the outline of our jaunt to Princeton. I brought away an additional LL.D., a gorgeous hood, very pleasant recollections.

Warfield, of course, would have been less taken aback by Kuyper than Dicey, given his familiarity with Kuyper's work and with the Calvinistic tradition in which he stood. He, like Kuyper, was an ardent theological polemicist, not given to exercising restraint when dealing with opinions that stood opposed to his own. It was because of such affinities that Warfield was known to American students as the 'American Kuyper'. Their similarities did not, however, mask their differences, and Kuyper was in no mind to use his visit to Princeton to smooth over them. Whereas Warfield engaged in apologetics and endorsed its use with unrivalled vigour, Kuyper declared at the start of his Stone Lectures that apologetics had proved utterly useless in the struggle between Christianity and modernism. Warfield found such aversion to apologetics "a standing matter of surprise," and declared that apologetics had a major part to play in Christianizing the world. Things were no easier when it came to Kuyper's fourth lecture on science. In it Kuyper asserted that within the realm of science there was a fundamental conflict between Christian and non-Christian presuppositions, and that this manifested itself in two kinds of science. To Warfield



this was sheer nonsense. Because of the unity and objectivity of science, he argued, there could be no difference in kind between the work of regenerate and unregenerate scientists - all scientists worked to construct "one edifice of truth."

Can we conclude from all this that Kuyper's visit to Princeton failed to have any positive impact on Warfield? No we cannot. Warfield praised Kuyper's lectures way beyond the call of courtesy, and expressed deep regret that he had been unable to attend one of them on account of an ulcerated tooth. He claimed, moreover, to differ with him only on minor matters. Since his visit to the United States, he wrote, Kuyper had become "one of our own prophets to whose message we have a certain right." Words were turned into actions when in 1912, on behalf of his Princeton colleagues, Warfield invited Kuyper to address the centenary celebrations of the founding of the Seminary later that year. Kuyper was obliged to decline, due to prior commitments, but the invitation to be a platform speaker at such an important moment in the life of the Seminary and in the tradition it represented could hardly have been possible had Warfield and his colleagues regarded Kuyper as being significantly at odds with Princeton dogma. There is even evidence that Kuyper's Stone Lectures directly influenced central aspects of Warfield's thought. In Warfield's most important treatments of Calvinism, for instance, he borrows so liberally from Kuyper's Lectures that it is clear that Warfield's understanding of Calvinism was largely indebted to Kuyper's exposition of it at Princeton. There are also hints, despite fundamental epistemological differences, that Warfield was partially persuaded by Kuyper's insistence on the radical influence of worldview on the results of science, and by Kuyper's stress on the role of the Holy Spirit in bearing witness to the authority and inspiration of scripture. There are signs, therefore, of a certain 'meeting of the wellsprings' — a certain *rapprochement* — sometime after Kuyper's visit to Princeton. This helps explain why Kuyper's influence in North America has worked partly *through* the Princeton Theology, even though in some important respects it is opposed to it.

Kuyper's visit to Princeton in the autumn of 1898 is more important for an understanding of Kuyper and Warfield's thought than has previously been recognized. In terms of Kuyper-scholarship, the very fact that the Stone Lectures represent a summary of his ideas designed for a foreign audience may be one of the reasons why their significance has been overlooked. They are, however, of crucial importance in any serious attempt to understand the overall shape not only of his ideas, but of his career and of his influence outside the Netherlands. This is closely tied to the fact that it was in his Stone Lectures that Kuyper first made deliberate, thor-

ough-going and comprehensive use of the worldview concept. This concept is so fundamental to his thought, so important to his career and so central to his international legacy that 'Kuyper' and 'worldview' are virtually inseparable. It is only fitting, therefore, that the centenary of Kuyper's Stone Lectures should be marked at Princeton by holding an international conference to discuss the range and scope of his legacy — a legacy so heavily indebted to Warfield.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: *This excerpt was taken from Kuyper's final Stone Lecture, "Calvinism and the Future". Here we find Kuyper's reflections on the Calvinism of his future, which is the Calvinism of our past, or is it? Reflecting a bit of the Calvinistic fervour referenced in the words of Dacey above, the force and breadth of Kuyper's prophetic vision still call us to consider the place Calvin holds in our church today, as well as the role Calvinism will play in the church of our future.*

#### CALVINISM AND THE FUTURE

Abraham Kuyper

What then are we to understand by this return to Calvinism? Do I mean that all believing Protestants should subscribe the sooner the better to the Reformed symbols, and thus all ecclesiastical multifariousness be swallowed up in the unity of the Reformed church organization? I am far from cherishing such crude, so ignorant, so unhistorical a desire. As a matter of course, there is inherent in every conviction, in every confession, a motive for absolute and unconditional propagandism, and the word of Paul to Agrippa, "I would to God that with little or with much, not you only, but also all that hear me this day, might become such as I am," must remain the heart-felt wish not only of every good Calvinist, but of every one who may glory in a firm immovable conviction. But so ideal a desire of the human heart can never be realized, in this our dispensation. First of all, not one Reformed standard, not even the purest, is infallible, as was the word of Paul. Then again the Calvinistic confession is so deeply religious, so highly spiritual, that, excepting always periods of profound religious commotion, it will never be realized by the large masses, but will impress with a sense of its inevitability only a relatively small circle. Furthermore our inborn one-sidedness will always necessarily lead to the manifestation of the church of Christ



in many forms. And last, but not least, absorption on a large scale by one church of the members of another can only take place at critical moments in history. In the ordinary run of things eighty percent of the Christian population die in the church in which they were born and baptized. Besides, such an identification of my programme with the absorption of one church by another would be at variance with the whole tendency of my argument. Not ecclesiastically, confined to a narrow circle, but as a phenomenon of universal significance, have I commended to you the Calvinism of history. Therefore what I ask, may in the main be reduced to the following four points: 1) that Calvinism shall no longer be ignored where the after-effects of its influence are still manifest; 2) that Calvinism shall again be made a subject of study in order that the outside world may cease to misrepresent it; 3) that its principles shall again be developed in accordance with the needs of our time, and consistently applied not only to Theology, but to every department of life; and 4) that the churches which still lay claim to confessing it, shall cease being ashamed of their own confession.

First then, Calvinism should no longer be ignored where it still exists, but rather be retraced where traces of its historical influence are still manifest. A pointing out in detail, with even some degree of completeness, of the traces that Calvinism has everywhere left behind in social and political, in scientific and aesthetic life, would in itself demand a broader study than could be thought of in the rapid course of a lecture. Allow me therefore, addressing an American audience, to point out a single feature in your own political life. I have already observed in my third lecture how in the preamble of more than one of your constitutions, while taking a decidedly democratic view, nevertheless not the atheistic standpoint of the French revolution, but the Calvinistic confession of the supreme sovereignty of God, has been made the foundation, at times even in terms, as I have pointed out, corresponding literally with the words of Calvin. Not a trace is to be found among you of that cynic anti-clericalism which has become identified with the very essence of the revolutionary democracy, in France and elsewhere. And when your President proclaims a national day of thanksgiving or when the houses of Congress assembled in Washington, are opened with prayer, it is ever new evidence that through American democracy there runs even yet a vein, which, having sprung from the Pilgrim Fathers, still exerts its power at the present day. Even your common-school system, inasmuch as it is blessed with reading of Scripture and opening prayer, points, though with decreasing distinctness, to like Calvinistic origin. Similarly in the rise of your university education, springing for the larger part from individual initiative; in the decentralized and autonomous char-

acter of your local governments; in your strict and yet not nomistic Sabbath-observance; in the esteem in which woman is held among you, without falling into the Parisian deification of her sex; in your sense for domesticity; in the closeness of your family ties; in your championship of free speech and in your unlimited regard for freedom of conscience; in all this your Christian democracy is in direct opposition to the democracy of the French revolution; and historically also it is demonstrable that you owe this to Calvinism and Calvinism alone. But, lo and behold, while you are thus enjoying the fruits of Calvinism, and while even outside of your borders the constitutional system of

Calvinism should no longer be ignored where it exists, but rather retraced where traces of its historical influence are still manifest.

government as an out-come of Calvinistic warfare, upholds the national honour, it is whispered abroad that all these are to be accounted blessings of Humanism, and scarcely any one still thinks of honouring in them the after-effect of Calvinism, the latter being believed to lead a lingering life only in a few dogmatically petrifed circles. What I demand then, and demand with an historic right, is that this ungrateful ignoring of Calvinism shall come to an end; that the influence it has exerted shall again receive attention where it still remains stamped upon the actual life of to-day; and that, where men of a wholly different spirit would unobservedly divert the current of life into French-revolutionary or German-pantheistic channels, you on this side of the water, and we on our side, should oppose with might and main such falsification of the historic principles of our life.

That we may be enabled to do so, I contend in the second place for an historical study of the principles of Calvinism. No love without knowledge; and Calvinism has lost its place in the hearts of the people. It is being advocated only from a theological point of view, and even then very one-sidedly and merely as a side issue. The cause of this I have pointed out in a previous lecture. Since Calvinism arose, not from and abstract system, but from life itself, it never was in the century of its prime presented as a systematic whole. The tree blossomed and yielded its fruit, but without anyone having made a botanic study of its nature and



growth. Calvinism, in its rise, rather acted than argued. But now this study may no longer be delayed. Both the biography and biology of Calvinism must now be thoroughly investigated and thought out, or, with our lack of self-knowledge, we shall be side-tracked into a world of ideas that is more at discord than in consonance with the life of our Christian democracy, and cut loose from the root on which we once blossomed so vigorously.

Only through such study will there become possible what I named in the third place: the development of the principles of Calvinism in accordance with the needs of our modern consciousness, and their application to every department on life. I do not exclude theology from this; for theology too exercises its influence upon life in all its ramifications; and it is, therefore, sad to see how even the theology of the Reformed Churches has in so many a country come under the sway of wholly foreign systems. But, at all events, theology is only one of the many sciences that demand Calvinistic treatment. Philosophy, psychology, aesthetics, jurisprudence, the social sciences, literature, and even the medical and natural sciences, each and all of these, when philosophically conceived, go back to principles, and of necessity even the question must be put with much more penetrating seriousness than hitherto, whether the ontological and anthropological principles that reign supreme in the present method of these sciences are in agreement with the principles of Calvinism, or are at variance with their very essence.

Finally I would add to these three demands — historically justified as it seems to me — still a fourth, that those churches which yet lay claim to professing the Reformed faith, shall cease being ashamed of this confession. You have heard how broad my conception and how wide my view are, even in the matter of ecclesiastical life. In free development only do I see the salvation of this Church-life. I exalt multiformity and hail in it a higher stage of development. Even for the church that has the purest confession, I would not dispense with the aid of other churches in order that its inevitable one-sidedness may thus be complemented. But what has always filled me with indignation was to behold a church or to meet the office-bearer of a church, with the flag furled or hidden under the garb of office, instead of being thrown out boldly to display its glorious colours in the breeze. What one confesses to be the truth, one must also dare to practise in word, deed, and whole manner of life. A church Calvinistic in origin and still recognizable by its Calvinistic confession, which lacks the courage, nay rather which no longer feels the impulse to defend that confession boldly and bravely against all the world, such a church dishonours not Calvinism but itself. Albeit the churches reformed in bone and marrow may be small and few in numbers, as churches they will always prove indispensable for Calvinism; and here also the smallness of the seed need not disturb us, if only that seed be sound and whole, instinct with generative and irrepressible life.

pTr

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*Gender, Sexuality, and the Trinity,*  
— James Torrance

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on *DCTalk*

and more...



# An Interview with Peter Brown: On Scholarship, Faith and Augustine

Alex Hwang

*In June of 1998 I had the pleasure of interviewing Peter Brown, professor of history at Princeton University. Dr. Brown is considered one of the foremost Augustinian scholars in the world and an authority in Late Antiquity and early Medieval studies. The reader will discover that Dr. Brown's intellect is matched by his great sense of humor. Dr. Brown is currently working on a book about wealth and poverty in late Antiquity.*

pTr: Dr. Brown, could you talk a little about your educational background and your upbringing?

Peter Brown: Yes. I think what is important about that is to realize that it is an education and an upbringing divided between Ireland and England. I grew up in Ireland, I am an Irish citizen. I come from a family of the Protestant minority in the south of Ireland. That did mean one important thing from an early period: I was in a society where religion, the division between Catholic and Protestant, was the absolutely central defining category of individuals and of groups. I remember when I was a six-year-old I heard about cowboys. I loved cowboys, and had seen cowboy movies, but I was really puzzled by one very important thing: I needed to know, were cowboys Catholics or Protestants? The fact that they weren't awfully good at being either did not strike me as very important. One had to know who they were and that meant: were they Protestant or Catholic? I think this is important because it was a time of a very self-confident and nationalist church dominated by Catholicism in the south of Ireland, very different from the case nowadays. But in the 1950's one could not ignore the sheer authority of the Catholic Church, nor could one ignore one's own Protestantism as giving one a separate identity from the majority of one's compatriots. This meant that I have always been interested in those periods of Chris-

tianity where Christianity has had to face the responsibility of its own power. I know that there are many people who study religion as if it were purely a matter of personal experience. I know many people who study the early church largely because of what appeals to them is that they are brought up against the views of an upright and high-minded minority, who, precisely because they were a minority, did not have to face the consequences of power or the responsibilities of power. It's very easy to like people like that. That may be so, but I have always liked somebody like Augustine, who had to make up his mind both on the very roots of his own personal religion but who also, as a Catholic bishop, had to make up his mind on the extent to which he could impose it on others and maintain it as a public religion. These are the issues which have always interested me. It meant that I always tipped towards the study of the Middle Ages rather than towards the early church, because the Middle Ages was the time when Christianity came into its own, as a fully public religion capable of exercising power.

pTr: You mentioned your natural leaning towards the Middle Ages. When did you begin to take interest in it as a formal discipline?

Peter Brown: It was as a relatively young undergraduate student at Oxford. I think my interest in the study of that period was partly due to the tension in my own mind, which I had as a young student at Oxford. It's important to conjure this up. Ireland is not England in a very real sense. Irish Protestantism is not at all like English Anglicanism. Irish Protestantism is very much

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a religion which, without being fundamentalist, wishes to look back directly to the early church. In a very profound way it wishes the Middle Ages hadn't happened at all. They think that the majority of their Catholic compatriots in Ireland still live in the Middle Ages and that it doesn't do them any good. It looks back much more to the Bible, again not necessarily in a fundamentalist or evangelical way, but it has a very deep biblical culture. With one's daily readings and one's sermons at church on the ancient Near East — Israel, Babylon, Egypt, the Roman Empire of the crucifixion and the Acts of the Apostle's — that was real history. And that was real ancient history; a history invested with all the sense of being the roots of one's own religion, of one's own world. I remember our rector. Whenever he was out of ideas for a sermon, which happened often, he would read long passages from Sir Leonard Woolley's *Excavations of Ur of the Chaldeas*. And I was left wondering why on earth Abraham moved away from such a comfortable town. So there was that sense that the real past and the real ancient world was the ancient Near East and the Roman Empire in which St. Paul was active. The Middle Ages wasn't important, in fact, it was a bad dream.

Coming to England meant encountering a very different world. For the first time I encountered a real presence of the Middle Ages. Ireland has beautiful eighteenth century buildings like those in Dublin, which resembles Philadelphia. It has wonderful early medieval remains, but the Middle Ages are not represented. Medieval buildings were destroyed, fell into ruin, or were blotted out after Cromwell. On the other hand, when I went to Oxford, I was absolutely bowled over by the sheer presence of the Middle Ages. There is the feeling when you enter an English country church or a college chapel that you quite literally just step back into the Middle Ages. Five hundred years have just vanished and you're just back there looking at the stained glass, looking at the carvings. This impression of the closeness of the Middle Ages fitted in with that wonderful sort of mystical Anglican romantic belief that this was a church that was in any case continuous with the Middle Ages.

So I was very torn between my English side, the side that had recovered the romance of the Middle Ages. I had traveled and seen Flemish paintings, I had read Thomas of Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*, and was for a long time interested in the end of the Middle Ages. My first work as a graduate student was on preparing a dissertation on excommunication in 15th century England. So I was very much tilted that way by my academic training. But, emotionally I always had the feeling that ultimately, the really important things in the history of Christianity happened before the Middle Ages began. They tended to happen not in Latin, but

in Greek. I had learned Greek, but I hadn't learned it to read Homer or Greek tragedy. I learned Greek to read the Gospel of St. John. That is, it was a biblical commitment to the Greek world and, by implication, to the ancient Near East. This bypassed the English Classical scholars who were overwhelmingly interested in pagan Greece and pagan Rome. So this was the tension in my mind, and it was in many ways the sheer good fortune of receiving a research fellowship from All Soul's College (which was equivalent to the Harvard Society Fellows) that gave me a full five to seven years in which to work out my own research. It gave me time to learn the languages necessary to turn away from Medieval history, in which I had been largely trained, to the study of the late Antique, late Roman period.

I have always been interested in those periods of Christianity where Christianity has had to face the responsibility of its own power.

pTr: You grew up in the church and as a scholar you have devoted yourself to the history of the church. What can you share about your own personal faith?

Peter Brown: Well that's not so easy to answer. Let me just begin to explain in some way. First of all, I had a very real feeling that, although Protestantism was my family religion, this particular Church of Ireland was the religion of a beleaguered minority. It was very unevangelical. Nobody dreamt of converting anybody to the Church of Ireland, because it probably wouldn't do them any good anyway. In a sense there was, without being too harsh on the Church of Ireland, at that time a certain narrowness and dryness. This was a time (1950's) when adolescent rebellion didn't involve drugs or sex or anything interesting like that. So it usually took religious form. And there is no doubt that I myself was very aware of the fact of my emotional growth and my capacity to envision other forms of religious experience. This was very important to me. It was a time when Catholicism was very much in the air. It was ever present in Ireland. And the more I traveled in Europe, seeing those great Catholic cathedrals all over Europe, the more I realized that one had to take this Catholicism seriously. And it was emotionally very attractive. It struck me as a much richer religion that



seemed to touch more of the emotions.

But this was still the 1950's and the issue of authority was, above all, deeply associated with Catholicism. Again, you see, we're back to what interested me about the Middle Ages — the nature of authority. This was a church which in the 1950's, in the pre-Vatican II period, really stood out by its claims to exercise authority over its believers. This was both its attraction and its repugnance to outsiders. So there were certain . . . call it religious flirtations, or a seeking out what was to be one's emotional horizon, questioning if it was to take religious form at all.

Basically I wished to remain a Christian for a long time. I, in fact, was very touched by Billy Graham in 1953. That, in some ways, was an attempt to recapture a sort of Protestant innocence. C.S. Lewis was awfully important to me. That Anglican neo-orthodoxy appealed to me, with its combination of respect for tradition, its romantic poetry, and its religious rhetoric, its ability to talk about moral issues as real issues — that is, the Screw Tape Letters. C.S. Lewis, don't forget, was a Northern Irish Protestant masquerading under an Anglo-Catholic disguise. His slightly puritan

I remember when I was a six-year old I heard about cowboys. I loved cowboys, and had seen cowboy movies, but i was really puzzled by one very important thing: I needed to know, were the cowboys Catholics or Protestants?

dour moral casuistry hit me. That was important. And also the wider side, the side of C.S. Lewis who was the great exponent of Milton. C.S. Lewis had an ability to put Christianity into a cosmic frame, which was, at that time, his answer to a very crude form of scientific humanism. That certainly appealed to me.

What won out in me, quite frankly, was a tolerance of religion, but not an adhesion to a religion. Again, one has to get the mood right — the mood of the 1950's early 1960's. Particularly with the influence of people like Jung, there was a reaction against the extreme anti-religiousness of someone like Freud. Just as C.S. Lewis reacted against the extreme scientific humanism of someone like Huxley. I was very much in favor of a Jungian way of seeing religion — that is, religion as one other way in which the human spirit expresses itself. That was very important to me when I began to

work seriously on Augustine. The belief that religious experience was a valid language which needed to be communicated to modern people, some of whom just threw up their hands in despair at any religious language at all. I remember, when I first began working on Augustine, I had to explain to a well-educated business man friend of mine that I was working on Augustine. He said, "O, my goodness, not the man whom condemned babies to be fried in Hell?" I suddenly said to myself, "Look Brown, you've got a task. You've got to get Augustine at least tolerated." One thing which I did notice was that people with a religious axe to grind often that hit me. Here was the real language of the soul. I was bowled over. What I discovered in Augustine was two things. First of all, a man who, although he was a great theologian, ended up with his feet deep in the soil of the real world. Second, a man who had very slowly and recently (don't forget this is 1953) been shown to belong deeply to the ancient, Classical World. Courcelle's *Recherches sur les "Confessions" de Saint Augustin* had appeared in 1951, and Marrou's *St. Augustin et la fin de la Culture Antique* had appeared in its final edition in 1949. This sudden discovery, that this was great thinker whose thought dominated future ages but, whose roots lay in a culture and in a neo-Platonic thought deeply linked to a very ancient world. Like a plant settled in ancient earth. So that is Augustine — a man caught between his own time and a deep pre-Christian pagan past, who would influence the Middle Ages. So Augustine provided me with a way to see the pre-Medieval roots of the Medieval church. Above all, this was a man who just wrote so well. He was joy to read. He had a rhetorician's ability to match his thoughts to the forms of expression. I remember moving from studying Thomas Aquinas' political thought, which is as clear as a bell but written in a very dull Latin, to a man who plainly expressed himself in a still classical way, with all the richness of a master of words.

pTr: Tell us more of the influence the *Confessions* had on you.

Peter Brown: The impact of the *Confessions* on me was very great. Here was somebody who had plainly discovered a language of the heart, that could cross the boundary between Christianity and non-Christianity. That's important, because what I certainly discovered when I was working on Augustine, (this was the period between 1960 to 1965) was that Augustine was one of the few Fathers of the Christian Church of the Late Roman period of whom one could really say that he had evolved a notion of the human heart, a notion of human motivation, a notion of inspiration, and of freedom which could be translated, as it were, directly into



modern English — into modern language without it being tied to a specific religious commitment. It was that real faith that Augustine's notions of grace could be talked about on the analogy of other forms of awareness of how the human psyche worked, such as the Freudian notion of the unconscious, modern notions of freedom, modern notions of complexes. It was a faith that one could 'translate.' It was as if one could create the chemical equivalent of a natural flavor, or a natural smell. In chemistry class, I am told, you can create banana smells. And I was creating banana smells. No doubt about that. My duty as a scholar, as I saw it in 1960, was not to adhere to the Augustinian doctrine of grace, but to "translate" that doctrine of grace, without doing violence to it, into a language which a modern person, without necessarily having a religious commitment, could understand.

I always had the felling that ultimately, the really important things happened before the Middle Ages began.

The book itself [Brown's *Augustine of Hippo*], although it is published in America at the University of California Press, when first offered to the California Press was almost turned down because its bibliography wasn't big enough to suit an academic publisher. Its original publisher was Faber & Faber in London. This was not a university press; it was simply a press that published W.H. Auden and T.S. Eliot. I deliberately chose to write a book that addressed a general educated public, and an academic audience, and I did so irrespective of their beliefs. I assumed that educated people in England in the 1960's were not hard core atheists, but were cultivated agnostics, that they were tolerant of religion, but without any commitment to particular religion. I very much pitched the language, quite frankly, with that in mind. Whether I succeeded or not is another matter, but it's important to bear in mind that was what I was trying to do. I think some of the book's weaknesses, as well as some of its strengths, come from that attempt.

pTr: Let's talk about *Augustine of Hippo*. It has become a standard textbook in the study of Augustine. What led you to come out with a new edition?

Peter Brown: Ten years ago an Augustinian scholar discovered 29 totally new letters of Augustine in a 15th C. manuscript, which no one had bothered to read be-

cause it was such a late manuscript. These new letters contained the same episcopal nitty-gritty, which first attracted me when I read the Loeb translation. They reveal aspects of Augustine that had first appealed to me. That is, these unusually vivid new letters show, once again, what it is to be a conscientious bishop exercising power, facing the responsibilities of power, acting as justly as you can. These are letters not only about more and even worse details about Antoninus of Fussala and others like him, they are poignant letters about Augustine's largely unsuccessful but passionate attempts to halt the slave trade in North Africa. They contain passionately interested questions to Roman lawyers as to what the exact rights are concerning the selling of children to slavery. They communicate a real sense of a conscientious old man, who at this time is at the age of 70, who would go down and interview people — for instance, a young girl whose family had been killed and who had been kidnapped by slave dealers. Somebody who has left his mark on the thought of the Middle of Ages, was in his own life deeply involved in the responsibilities of a bishop. It was very challenging for me to have to think again about power and the responsibilities that come with it. These new letters show the huge weight of duty that rested on Augustine's shoulders. He was constantly postponing, constantly complaining about having to postpone the writing of the City of God. Instead, he had to deal with the slave trade. Then, only about five years ago, 27 totally new sermons came out. This time Augustine was speaking against Donatists and against a paganism whose vitality we simply had not imagined until these sermons appeared.

pTr: Why have these documents emerged so late?

Peter Brown: They only survived in a limited number of copies in the Middle Ages. They were copied down at the end of the Middle Ages, because I suspect people had become interested in the Fathers of the Church again. They had circulated very sluggishly in the Middle Ages and were almost lost because they didn't talk about theology; they didn't talk about the things that Augustine would leave to future ages. They talked about the real world and they talked about a Carthage which, in around 400 A.D., was plainly half-pagan. But if you're copying out these sermons in a Northern Europe that has become totally Christian, they are no longer relevant to you. The Venerable Bede actually read one of these sermons. It is a sermon of fifteen-hundred lines that would have taken two-and-a-half hours to preach. The Venerable Bede only copied out three hundred lines from it — lines only devoted to condemning banquetting and drunkenness on New Year's Day. The whole of Augustine's debate with a liv-



ing paganism, his debate with the living Neo-Platonism that supported this paganism dropped out. It was not relevant to Bede. I suspect that the sermon was not published in the Reformation because it reveals Augustine to be basically a Lutheran at heart. That is, the sermon shows his tremendous insistence over against the many gods of paganism, that Christ was the only mediator; there was no other way to get from earth to God, but Christ only. He didn't like Christians even kissing the doorway to the church as they entered. He said there was nothing holy about a church, just a place that we come to gather. We just stir up each other singing psalms like sailors singing a sea chant when they are pulling a rope. That's all there is to it. Churches aren't temples. It was a deliberately austere message. I think by the time the Reformation hit Mainz, the venerable abbot just simply mis-filed them on purpose. You get the sudden voice from the year 400 — from a world where the defense against paganism, the defense of total monotheism against polytheism is still what grips Augustine. And by 1500, that battle has been fought and they didn't want to fight it again. So the rare manuscript, seldom copied before 1500, remained unpublished and unread until 1992.

pTr: In your biography, you seem to refrain from making judgments about Augustine, good or bad. This must have been difficult, considering what an opinionated figure Augustine was. Can you talk about your method?

Peter Brown: Absolutely right! And if anybody had told me in the 1960's that they could detect a theological commitment, let me remind you, I would have been deeply shocked. My friend Henry Chadwick described my book in his *Past Masters* book on Augustine, "a little masterpiece, 119 pages of lucid and concise summary of Augustine's thought." In his bibliography he added, "For a biography without the theology see P. Brown Augustine of Hippo." And in a sense, in the 1960's I would have gloried in that description. Whether I do so now is another matter. Let me just tell you why I did it then and why I wouldn't do it that way now. Don't forget this is the 1960's not the 1990's. Forty years of scholarship, particularly Anglo-American scholarship, has blossomed. It is like a whole landscape now covered with trees, that was a desert when I began in the 1960's. Most good Augustinian scholarship, at that time, was French or German. Now, the English speaking world has more than come into its own. And what has it done? It's done something which was only beginning to be done. First of all, for the first time, in the case of Donatism, Pelagianism, and Manicheism, we have really come to know what the opponents of Augustine really thought, felt, and hoped for. This had

only begun in 1960; but it struck me terribly. To commit one's self to a theological interpretation of Augustine would have led a scholar, unless he was very wise and very old (and don't forget I was in my 30's — I wasn't very old and I certainly wasn't very wise, but I at least knew my limitations in this direction) to commit serious misrepresentations of the alternatives which

I wished to remain Christian for a long time. I, in fact was very touched by Billy Graham in 1953.

That, in some ways, was an attempt to recapture a sort of Protestant innocence. C.S. Lewis was awfully important to me. That Anglican neo-orthodoxy appealed to me, with its combination of respect for tradition, its romantic poetry, and its religious rhetoric, its ability to talk about moral issues as real moral issues.

were available at Augustine's own time. As an historian, my first duty, in my own eyes, was not to Augustine's mind but to his age. My task was to describe where a man thinking such thoughts as his fitted in or failed to fit with a wider world. And there, I still think that whatever the weaknesses of keeping the reader guessing as to my own theological commitments, what emerged was a far more three dimensional view. It was possible, for example, to realize that Pelagius' views on freedom were based on moral and social currents that had a profile of their own, and that there was an element of high tragedy in the Pelagian Controversy. It was not just a cheap melodrama of Christian truth defeating heretical error. The same with Manichaenism, and the same with Donatism. Part of the historian's job is to turn melodrama into tragedy. A historian has to make people realize that no matter how right a certain side might be, that is not always apparent at the time. It is the duty of the historian to make that absolutely clear. In that sense my apparent lack of commitment was part of a deep, overriding commitment to seeing Augustine in the round. No matter how much I admired him, I felt that my friend Gerald Bonner's *Augustine: Life of Controversies*, (which ap-



peared four years before my own) lacked that quality. My commitment to Augustine himself was always balanced by a commitment to the alternatives.

What are the weaknesses that are involved in my approach? One limitation of the book stems from my effort at 'translation.' There are subtle anachronisms in the biography which perhaps the student should be aware of. One of the obvious anachronisms is that, quite frankly, the legacies that Augustine left to the future have more prominence in my treatment of him than those issues which perhaps he shared with contemporaries, but did not bequeath to the future. Hence, his doctrine of freedom and grace I just fell on. I fell on it from its first formulations; I followed it through in the Confessions; I followed it right up to his notions of predestination. This was largely because in that element I, as a Western European, still had Augustine running in my blood. Whether it was in versions, such as psychoanalysis or in strictly religious versions, such as Calvinism, how to define the human person is just one of the great Western hang-ups that began with Augustine. I was a part of it, and if it is an anachronism, a part that needed "translating" for modern readers — big deal! It's part of what makes Augustine interesting. Perhaps I put too much emphasis on it for that reason. What did I miss out? The Holy Trinity is nowhere to be seen. And that's actually rather important. Augustine's notion of God is almost totally absent from my biography. It was a biography of Augustine. 'God

Augustine was one of the few Fathers of the Christian Church of the late Roman period of whom one could really say that he evolved a notion of the human heart, a notion of inspiration, and of freedom.

should keep out of it,' was my opinion. I think that might not have been right. That was what led Henry Chadwick to say that it was a biography without theology — without theology in the true sense. There I really realize that I was wrong in one important respect. It is something which, frankly, only experience has taught me. I failed to communicate the full weight of the Neo-Platonic debate on monotheism. What does it really mean to insert a single active personal God in the middle of a universe, which no matter how spiritual and no matter how high pitched it might be did not have room

for such a God. Quite frankly it has taken me 30 years of further study of late Antiquity, in particular, the debate between Platonism and Christianity all over the Mediterranean, to measure what Augustine's monotheism actually did to alter the Ancient view of the universe. Part of me is still an old-fashioned Platonist. I think that Augustine threw out a lot of 'baby with the bath water.' The real victim of Augustine's notion of grace is not human freedom, it's the notion of the cosmos. It's the notion that the material universe is also a reflection of God. The Platonists of the Greek Orthodox tradition seemed to have preserved this more successfully. That is the real victim of Augustine's emphasis on the human will. It's all very well crying over grace and free will, but it is the universe that is at stake. And there, quite frankly, in 1960, I did not have the skills nor the emotional sympathies to understand that. It is a good example of how concentrating on an obvious streak in the Augustinian tradition that goes straight to us led me to underestimate those issues which plainly weighed more heavily on his contemporaries, which are the nature of God, of the Trinity, of the universe. And the newly discovered sermons very much show that. When people gathered to hear Augustine, what was the best he could give them? It wasn't grace and free will: it was the vision of God, the yearning for the vision of God, the sense of the majesty of God.

*pTr:* On page 344 of your biography you speculated that had young Pelagius met the wiser and more mature Augustine face to face, the controversy might have perhaps taken a different direction. Would you change this judgment today?

*Peter Brown:* Two years ago Francois Dolbeau discovered the beginning of a sermon that had been cut off as it traveled through the Middle Ages. The sermon was a good summary against Pelagianism. Now that we have the beginning, we know that this was the sermon that was preached in 416 when the news came through to Augustine that Pelagius had been exonerated by the Council of Diospolis. And what does Augustine say? "I have constantly tried to make contact with Pelagius, I sent Orosius with an oral message to admonish Pelagius orally. Pelagius has taken no notice." Augustine goes on to say, "I did not wish to take up pen by name against him." It shows that they came near. I was probably wrong to speculate that Augustine would have had any effect on him at all. They were on a collision course. Pelagius doesn't come out so well from that. I mean, Pelagius felt that he could ignore Augustine, even though Augustine went out of his way to send an oral message to him by way of Orosius. Whether Orosius could be trusted to say anything tactfully, I don't know; but that is new evidence.



What's at stake in this? I have to redefine some of it from Augustine's point of view. First of all, it is a total misunderstanding to think that Pelagius represents an early Christian notion committed to freedom, while Augustine represents a commitment to grace. Pelagius was ferociously concerned with freedom, that is there. But if anything, the problem that Augustine faced by the time he became a bishop in 397 was an excessive belief in grace. By this I mean a religious world that took for granted that the great and good happenings of their time happened because of divine inspiration. The conversion of Constantine is a classic example. Signs blaze out of the sky, dreams, and visions. The cult of martyrs enormously emphasized what I would call a sort of "thermo-nuclear" grace. Huge detonations of grace that enabled them to act as out of this world heroes.

So, rather than looking immediately at Pelagius as a defender of Christian freedom against Augustine as a defender of the opposite, we should look at a world that already has its own, highly dramatic view of grace. The cult of martyrs was powerful. This was the world that Augustine, as the newly consecrated bishop, entered into, as we see in some newly discovered sermons

These unusually vivid new letters show what it is to be a conscientious bishop exercising power, and acting as justly as you can. They are poignant letters about Augustine's largely unsuccessful but passionate attempts to halt the slave trade in North Africa.

of 397. He deliberately takes on the cult of the martyrs. He doesn't attack it but says, "look here, what is the message for us? It isn't great high moments of triumph that you can enter into by boozing and dancing. You must remember that anybody on their sick bed can receive the same grace from God as did the martyrs." And this was the emphasis that Augustine gives from then onwards. For him, grace is all-powerful because it touches every aspect of people's lives. It is not just for heroes.

This means that Augustine's notion of grace is by far the most democratic and egalitarian in the whole of the early church. Instead of concentrating on individuals who have received a high level of charisma, he treated

grace in a more humble and less distinct manner. Everyone needs it and can have it. So he is absolutely resolute that married women receive as much grace as nuns, and nuns should be humble and remember this fact. Or that women should receive as much grace as men, and that men should be humble and remember this fact. And uneducated people receive as much grace as educated people, and the educated should be humble and remember this fact. Everybody is like a poor man at the banquet, who has nothing to offer. I think that's important. If you look at Augustine's notion of grace against its general background, in the religion of late Antiquity, he takes a notion of grace which is wider.

The notion that Augustine created grace against some preexistent notion of Christian freedom just isn't true. He says, "look here, there is no such thing as privileged grace", while Pelagius says, "Of course there is freedom!" But Augustine had come to abandon this notion of freedom largely because he wanted everyone to be active. In the Pelagian position there is a very real and sincere belief that Christians, through their freedom, can maintain their codes of behavior and, above all, can be free to do the normal good things that Christians do, like alms giving. But Augustine saw that in this notion there is very little triumph for the average person. There is no victory over sin which your average Joe could win with grace just as successfully as could any of martyr. That I think is the issue. I don't want to talk down Pelagius. Many Christians would certainly have agreed with Pelagius in a lot of his assumptions, like John Chrysostom — a truly great preacher. But what's lacking is that sense of victory, which Augustine offers to humble believers, in all his sermons.

*pTr:* After so many years of trying to understand this great but distant figure, how do you assess him? Have your views of him changed?

*Peter Brown:* There was a time when I disliked more what he stood for. But you can forgive a lot since he writes so beautifully. What he was made to stand for was a rather introverted, over-personalized, subjective piety. And I wonder if that view of Augustine was just a double whammy of 1960's psycho analysis plus the rather selfish, inward looking streaks in contemporary Protestantism and Catholicism. I think he didn't justify it. I'm much more aware of other sides of him. I've been around the Mediterranean, and religiously, I have come to appreciate Islam and Orthodoxy although I myself have become a moderately devout Episcopalian. But certainly my own religious experience has led me to realize that yes, Augustine did miss out on some important elements available to other late Antique Christians, and one of the most serious ones is overlooking the sacredness of the universe as a whole. On



that issue, he saw the human drama of salvation in intensely personal terms, almost independent of God's creation. I think salvation and creation are in a balance somewhere. On the one hand, we fall for a lot of rather self-deluded naturalism, by which every instinct and every human physical activity is viewed as wonderful, which it isn't. On the other hand, we get caught in an over-subjective emphasis on the human will and the human urge for salvation. I think Augustine left us without a language to mediate between these two. I think that is a very real weakness and it's one whose

A historian has to make people realize that no matter how right a certain side might be, that is not always apparent at the time. It is the duty of the historian to make that absolutely clear.

history should be followed. I think it's far more important in the long run than the debate on grace and free will.

I also have a much greater sense of somebody who, because of very, very deep loyalties to certain ideas — loyalties to God and to the Catholic Church — gave his life over, up to the end of his life, not to personal agendas but to the concerns of the Catholic Church. In that sense he is more Roman than I had thought. The old *res publica* demands sacrifice, and sacrifice himself he will. The old Roman sense of loyalty to the *res publica*, is very real in Augustine. His *res publica* is the Church. There is a marvelous moment when he quotes Cicero to his old friend Romanianus. Romanianus had asked for a laudatory speech in favor of his dead wife. But Augustine was told that Romanianus is shackled up with a concubine. As a bishop he cannot possibly praise the dead wife while Romanianus is shackled up with a concubine. It's a perfectly respectable thing for a Roman gentleman but not for Augustine, a bishop. And so he says, "Remember Cicero who said: 'in this case it would be good to be soft hearted but it would be worse to be weak kneed.'" No way! And I think that I would now put more emphasis on that element of Augustine who simply had to face the responsibility of his power, to be loyal to his own ideas at the cost of bitter, exhausting controversy. The older Augustine has become just as a sympathetic figure to me as the younger Augustine.

pTr: Not the hardened, dark portrait that emerges at the end of your biography?

Peter Brown: Well...I think I've changed. There I have changed. And there is no doubt about it. One's own experience of growing older obviously gives one greater sympathy. But also the actual evidence of the new letters (which come from the last 10 years of his life) absolutely rocked me on my heels. They showed me in some ways that I was wrong. As a bishop he did not exercise automatic authority in late Roman society, but he was still forced to exercise some form of authority. So he is running much harder to keep up than I had thought.

pTr: Is there anyone today like Augustine?

Peter Brown: That's not easy. I think it is not easy to find in the modern Christian tradition someone like Augustine. Oddly enough in the modern Islamic Sufi tradition of North Africa there are still people like him. That is, people who are really able to combine mystical contemplation with a very high level of public activity. Again, these new sermons on the vision of God took me absolutely by surprise. Augustine, as a bishop, really is a mystic and remains one. For a mystic to be an active ruler of a congregation is not very usual these days in modern Christianity. But if you look, at say, Martin Lings' description of a Sufi saint of the 1920's in North Africa you may well actually glimpse a human type like Augustine, a man who can be both an active person with wide responsibilities and at the same time a man absolutely crushed by the presence of God. But that isn't a modern Western phenomenon. Well, maybe, if you look at the Ayatollah; but it's as well it isn't widespread! The late Romans had a sense that a man can be a man of two things — he is man of contemplation and he is a man of action. We have really split the two. But with Augustine, we have someone who is crushed by the presence of God, but who is also active as a leader in the Church.

pTr: Thank you very much, Dr. Brown.

Peter Brown: You're very welcome. Thank you.



# Rock's Would-Be Revolutionaries

Thomas V. Aiuto & Jeremy Dowsett

"Teen-age angst has paid off well/Now I'm bored and old."  
Nirvana, "Serve the Servants"

*The following is the first in a series of articles on Popular music, both secular and Christian, by Jeremy D. Dowsett and Thomas Vito Aiuto. This first article focuses on the secular rock band Rage Against the Machine. The next issue will take a look at Christian Contemporary Music artists DCTalk.*

In the world of pop music criticism, it is already passe to scoff at the word "alternative," or ask ironically, "alternative to what?" That conversation is over, and now it must be taken as a given that the entertainment industry has appropriated various counter-culture aesthetics and attitudes for the sake of profit. Industry co-opted art. Capitalism has co-opted rebellion. Echoes of the jeremiad can still be heard over the ashes of Seattle, flannel-clad mall rats whimpering that when something "underground" goes "mainstream," it dies; but if you're truly hip, you're done being cynical about the death of "alternative music" via overblown commercialism, and you've moved on to bigger and better things, like Swing (have you seen that Gap ad?).

Yet in trying to critically assess pop music, specifically from a Christian viewpoint, one must not move on too soon, but engage the above paradigm with caution. The idea, which I will call *Appropriation Theory*, is that there exists two essential sides in the battle: on one side are "the bad guys," the corporate elite and their army of middle-class drones, who propound a strict moral code of conformity, unquestioning submission to authority, patriotism, ladder-climbing, delayed gratification (that means working ten extra hours a week so you can have a condo in Florida when you die), materialism, and, worst of all, intolerance. On the other, "the good guys," the (very) loosely allied forces of skateboarders, straight-edgers, Deadheads, neo-Beats, Black activists, punks, grunge kids, and Marilyn Manson fans, fastidiously resisting the tyranny of the bean counters

by choosing lifestyles contrary to their rigid mores. *Appropriation Theory* also asserts that the former group have appropriated the aesthetic, style and verve of the latter for the purpose of profit, with the effect of paralyzing the revolution that "the good guys" are trying to throw.

For the latter group, orthodoxy amounts to avoiding the trappings of the former. The paramount heresy is "selling out," of "appropriating" the properties of "the Establishment" for gain. To not fly in the face of the status quo, irreverently as possible, is to risk having your credentials as a true rebel revoked. Want to insult somebody today? Call them a "sell out" and watch their blood boil. Check out Kurt Cobain, one of the definitive poster boys for *Appropriation Theory*, several months before killing himself, appearing on the cover of *Rolling Stone*. Cobain is apparently comfortable with, or oblivious to, the irony inherent in his having become the poster boy for one of the Monsters of Corporate Rock. (The inclusion of *Rolling Stone* in this article is appropriate. Itself supposedly once a journal devoted to chronicling the goings-on of the Sixties' musical and cultural 'underground,' it has now become a journal predominately devoted to chronicling mostly-naked teen starlets in its "Hot Issue" amid reams of tobacco and alcohol advertisements. Perhaps Cobain was very much aware of the irony and not at all comfortable with it; his suicide note suggests as much.) There he stands in a disaffected pose, flipping off the viewer (oooh! We all know what *that* means!) while

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his magic marker-scrawled t-shirt bawls the the credo "Corporate Rock Still Sucks." Cobain, even while Nirvana appeared at the top of the Billboard charts, simultaneously filling stadiums and the pockets of the innumerable sales executives at their record label, wanted to point his finger (ahem) at "the bad guys" ("Corporate Rock") while affirming his place among the ranks of the truly alternative. He hadn't "sold out." How could he have? He had purple hair and was sticking his middle finger in the air! This image of Cobain succinctly sums up the ethos of his side of *Appropriation Theory* (his suicide, unfortunately, included).

In my youth (about eight months ago), I put quite a bit of stock into this view. Most Pop music makers and listeners do as well, both Christian and secular; it takes quite an effort to do otherwise. And why not? Who wants to be part of the big, dumb crowd? Who wants to be a nobody? No, we are Americans, people who are defined by our 'swim-against-the-current' philosophy. What else do you expect from a people whose founding document is "The Declaration of Independence?" Whether you're Frank Sinatra or Sid Vicious (OK, he was a Brit, but surely an American at heart) or have simply had a few too many at the karaoke bar, everyone wants to do it "My Way." Everyone wants to be on the right side of the fence erected by our media culture. But last summer at a Rage Against the Machine concert I finally decided that *Appropriation Theory* has about as much merit as the color coded Gospels created by the Jesus Seminar. After years of listening to alternative music, among various other stripes of Pop culture entertainment, I believe that the core of this distinction between the "good guys" and "bad guys" is completely vacuous. It is my hypothesis that at its very foundation this delineation between the two groups ends up being meaningless; and a critical look at things will unmask any "appropriation" by "the bad guys" or "the good guys" of each others wares as merely one neighbor borrowing flour from another across the clothesline. Each side spends vast amounts of time and energy defining itself against the other, yet they are both marked by an uncompromising idolatry which manifests itself in the marketer/consumer relationship that dominates our culture; what's more, both feed off of one another, trading themselves and each other to the highest bidder. Beyond the surface, beyond whether you're either wearing crisp new Polo chinos or oversized FreshJive jeans, there really aren't two opposing sides, but one nation under a spell of narcissism gone monstrous, feeding on consumerism and image.

Clear as mud? Hang with me for a bit as we look at how this works itself out in a specific example, and you'll see where I'm headed.

### *Testing Appropriation Theory: Rage Against the Machine*

Both an exemplar and innovator in popular music today, Rage Against the Machine is a four-man unit fronted by physically and vocally explosive vocalist Zack de la Rocha. Rage's music couples the dramatic power chords and 4/4 war march thump of classic 70's and 80's heavy metal, with the rapid-fire vocal delivery and attitude of some hardcore rap music, creating a fairly

As far as the crowds who came to watch Rage Against the Machine, they were about as culturally diverse as the cast of Melrose Place, their behavior equally and predictably as abominable.

interesting hybrid of the two. De la Rocha's vocals find their complement in guitarist Tom Morello's eclectic talents; while possessing full command of the Pete Townsend/Jimmy Page/Randy Rhoads arsenal of power chords, he one-ups the old school by manipulating many of his solos into sounding like the cut and scratch whine of a hip-hop turntable maestro. (The sleeve of Rage's first album proudly proclaimed that none of the songs employed any sampling or other computer gimmicks, simply guitar, bass and voice, a pretty amazing claim after giving the record a good listen.) The rhythm section also benefits from a rap sensibility, giving the music the quality found in the cream of hardcore Hip-Hop (early Public Enemy, Ice Cube, Wu-Tang Clan) of sounding both ominously deliberate and hysterically chaotic at the same time. Yet the lyrical content of their music isn't the docu-drama violence and misogyny of hardcore rap, or the insipid nihilism found in much "alternative" music today, (or even the wizards and dragons fare of their obvious predecessors, Led Zeppelin), but commentary on political and social events from a vaguely Socialist/Marxist perspective, with Capitalism and Christianity vying for the role of chief scapegoat (also as in Marx). Though these lyrics are frequently trite and predictable (even while trying to rouse a revolution) one will occasionally find a clever cut on one of Rage's favorite targets within their verse-chorus-verse marriage of electric guitar turned up to 11 and the *Communist Manifesto*, as in "Bulls on Parade," the refrain of which taunts the family values, gun-toting, Charlton Heston crowd. "They rally 'round the fam-



ily,” de la Roacha simultaneously sneers and screams, “with pockets full of shells.” Or in “Down Rodeo,” where the biracial de la Rocha envisions himself going to Beverly Hills armed with a shotgun to confront the racial and social elite: “These people ain’t seen a brown-skinned man since they grandparents bought one.”

Rage doesn’t limit its crusade to just lyrics either. They have consistently played at the right charity shows, trumpeted the right (well, actually “left”) causes, and taken pride in trying to use their music and their live shows as a venue for dissemination of ideas and information pertaining to the struggle. On the insert of their last album was a list of recommended readings, ostensibly fare which Rage endorsed, ranging from Guevara’s *Guerilla Warfare* to Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth* to the anonymously written *The Anarchist’s Cookbook* to, most notably pertinent to this article, a book about the journalist Mumia Abu-Jamal, of the infamous case in Philadelphia where he was convicted of the murder of a Philly cop. (Jamal’s trial, at best a remarkably clumsy administration of justice, at worst a blatant racist conspiracy, has erupted into a worldwide civil rights issue, one that Rage has stumped for repeatedly. But more on that later.) Recently the members of the band appeared on a gigantic billboard near one of the tunnels entering Manhattan which proclaimed their opposition to the clothing manufacturer *Guess?* for use of overseas and local sweatshops in the production of their goods.

So what does Rage Against the Machine offer the

Revolution, by these standards,  
looks a lot like a fraternity’s  
annual golf charity outing: you  
get to have a good time, and  
convince your conscience that  
you’re helping those who couldn’t  
afford to join the party.

Christian listener? Well, first we must restate again Rage’s, well, *rage*, against many things most Christians would affirm. Let’s say, oh, church, for starters. “Is all the world jails and churches?” moans de la Roacha in “Vietnow,” from last year’s *Evil Empire*, and you begin to realize he doesn’t see much of a difference between the two. Their latest stage show featured gigantic 1950’s textbook illustrations of, among other things, men and women praying, the American flag, and Ku Klux Klan members (apparently lumping these three together, in true *Appropriation Theory* fashion), with damning rhe-

torical questions flashing above each image. America is one of the primary machines against whom this band rages, and if you are an American Christian, well, then the target they’re aiming for usually ends up being you, or someone like you. But the paradox is that this is what the strength of Rage Against the Machine happens to be, especially for the Christian listener. Rage throws down the gauntlet and demands an answer from America, from the Christian, from the status quo, and all of the above are in need of just that. While I wouldn’t want to affirm their ideology wholly, maybe not even very much of it, what other popular music today asks questions about the source of our American or Christian values, and the tenuous relationship between the two? What other band talks outloud about the relationships in our country between class and race and wealth? What other band gives its listeners free history lessons within the body of their songs?! (The very best Hip-Hop of the last ten years does all three at various times. Public Enemy’s “Can’t Truss It,” from *Apocalypse ’91: The Enemy Strikes Black*, does all three at once, which finds Chuck D. delivering a sermon-like summary of the African slave trade and its subsequent effect on our society in his trademark baritone, over horns and a funk beat, flavored with African drums. You need to hear it to believe how good it is.) “Since fifteen hundred and sixteen/Minds attacked and overseen,” begins “People of the Sun,” the opening track of *Empire*, which finds de la Rocha delivering a truncated lecture (*extremely* truncated actually, not more than ten lines) for anyone within shrieking distance about the cultural and actual genocide of the indigenous people of America inflicted on them by the first white settlers, all set to a riotous beat and a squealing guitar hook. Rage seems to have drawn a bead, at least in a limited way, on what in Biblical language would be called “righteous anger.” You get the feeling when you see Zack howl into the camera on MTV that he’s pissed about something worth being pissed about (say, maybe the bloodshed of the Zapatista conflict in Mexico), as opposed to someone like that Gavin what’s-his-name of Bush, who when he howls into the camera looks as if he’s doing it because he’s beautiful, and he looks good when he screams, and that sells records, and he knows it. Rage does tend to wear their causes on their sleeve, yet they also play their music and live their lives (from what very little I know of their lives) as if those causes are worth living for, and because of this, any thoughtful person, especially any Christian, needs to pay attention. We are foolish to ignore any who enter the debate with vigor and thought simply because they aren’t necessarily “on our side;” and Rage, relative to the scope of popular music, enter the debate with much of both.

Yet Rage Against the Machine, as well-intentioned as they might be, ultimately fail. They fail not only



from a Christian perspective (and not for the reasons you might think) but even in the execution of their own ideals, their own agenda, due in large part to the emptiness of the *Appropriation Theory* paradigm which they employ, the empty “us-vs.-them” image game described above which is employed by nearly every Pop music outfit today. This failure is especially inevitable, and unusually poignant, for a band like Rage Against the Machine, who seem to be truly serious about posing an authentic challenge to the musical and social power structures which reign supreme. Yet how can

The capitalists have not so much appropriated the revolutionary ethos and turned it against itself, as they have discovered that revolution and Adam Smith-style profiteering are based on the same ethic--“I’m taking what’s mine and anyone in my way gets kicked in the teeth.”

they hope to do this when they consistently fight with the weapons of the regime which they want to topple? Aside from the occasional clever critiques of their straw-men opposition, some of which is noted above, most of Rage’s songs are pretty shallow. “Vitriolic diatribe” would pretty much describe many of them, the lyrics mostly bumper-sticker sloganeering. No terribly new insight or authentic engagement with opposing ideologies. Instead the weight of their argument rests on image. Image is given supreme precedence over ideas; style gets the nod over substance. Consider that the “syllabus” mentioned above which was included in the packaging of their last album was set forth not in text, but in a *photograph* of the covers of these books, a fact that speaks volumes (if I can be permitted a literary analogy in this situation) about the means Rage uses to convey its message. Certainly it takes much less thought and much less time to look at the cool picture of Malcolm X biting his lip and holding aloft his fist in defiance on the cover of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, then it is to actually read and understand what’s inside. This example of the cult of image, so prevalent in our image saturated culture, really isn’t acceptable for a group who stands for what Rage stands for. The members of the band may not be hypocrites in the sense that they don’t believe what they say, but they can’t avoid

inconsistency when they proffer their rhetoric in this fashion, and the success of their venture suffers for it, as I saw at a concert of theirs last summer.

“I won’t do what you tell me”

I went to see Rage Against the Machine with some friends in Philadelphia last summer during their turbulent tour with reigning hardcore rap monarchs, Wu-Tang Clan. Turbulent, for while Rage hoped that the pairing of these two somewhat culturally opposite bands could bring together two culturally diverse audiences, which might affect real social change, neither of these things truly happened, at least not very well. Rage Against the Machine is a predominantly white band (two members are biracial) which plays to an almost exclusively white audience, while Wu-Tang Clan is an exclusively black group which plays to that curious cross-section that most hardcore rap plays to: males, ages 12-25, who are either a.) urban blacks, b.) suburban blacks who partially identify with the plight of urban blacks, or c.) suburban whites who wish they were either b.), or, preferably, a.). Wu-Tang, after several shows where one or more of their nine regular members would simply fail to materialize at showtime, left the tour completely about half way through. (The reason given for these frequent absences was usually “personal problems,” whatever that means. I was especially disappointed when my favorite member of the Wu-Tang, Ol’ Dirty Bastard, a/k/a Osiris, a/k/a Big Baby Jesus [don’t ask] played hooky from the Philly show.) As for the crowds who came to watch the tour, they were about as culturally diverse as the cast of *Melrose Place*, their behavior equally and predictably as abominable.

Because of traffic the group I was with arrived somewhat late to the venue, the Sony Entertainment Plaza, one of those big anonymous looking outdoor amphitheater deals right outside of Philly. Before we even got off the freeway I started to cringe as we observed the passengers of the stopped cars on the freeway and saw future concertgoers who could basically be fit into two categories: packs of loud, obnoxious, visibly drunk or stoned white college freshmen (and I do mean freshmen; I saw maybe ten women all night), or pairs and trios of pre-pubescent white boys decked out in hundreds of dollars worth of “Wu-Wear” (the Wu-Tang Clan’s own brand of clothing), about to be dropped off by mom for a night of entertainment. After having parked, we hurried in to the show anxious not to miss any more of the Wu-Tang set which was already under way. It was then that the disquieting reality that the freeway scene had tried to warn us of became readily apparent. Until then, the group of friends I’d come



with had been expecting—we had been *hoping*—for something more; this was, after all, a Rage Against the Machine show, a pairing of two socially subversive bands, joined for maximum effect. We expected to hear speeches delivering Marxist analyses of contemporary issues, see petitioners getting signatures for various causes, find book stands vending the Rage library; maybe even witness a demonstration on how to assemble an AK-47. Not quite. As we ducked our heads under the awning of the theater I turned to the guys I was with, half-disappointed, half-already appreciating the irony, and verbalized the sad reality: “This looks just like a rock concert.”

The event’s proximity to a rock concert became increasingly clear throughout the night. The prototypical attendee of the show, the same athletically-built white male we’d seen on the exit ramp, had taken off his black Metallica shirt so that everyone could see the tattoo of the Tasmanian devil on his shoulder. The air was ponderous with that sweet co-mingling of beer and marijuana which can only be achieved at college house parties and outdoor concerts. The restroom was packed shoulder to shoulder with these sweaty guys shouting “Rage rules!” and “Killer Bees!” (an alternate moniker for the Wu-Tang Clan) as (most of us) waited for the urinal. There was enough testosterone in the air to stun a medium-sized deer, and for me to realize that maybe this was just a plain old rock concert after all.

Soon after Wu-Tang finished their lackluster set, Rage took the stage with a plain, tangible urgency, capitalizing as much as any band I’ve ever seen on that anticipatory electricity which resides at a concert before the headliners appear. There was an oceanic rush by the crowd to the front of the stage which did not diminish as the show progressed, scads of people moving in waves from the grassy hill in the rear to the front of the auditorium. That surge of motion and energy which came from the crowd’s side was equalled and spurred on from the band’s side. Zack de la Rocha met and exceeded the expectations set by his many MTV appearances, leaping and writhing around the stage like one of those lab monkeys gone berserk from drugs and isolation. The audience fed on his tenacity, led by de la Rocha as he contorted and whipped himself around like a dervish, eagerly absorbing the energy he doled out and figuratively following him, always ravenous for more. One of the concert’s two peak moments, sad to say, was the playing of “Killing in the Name of,” one of Rage’s trademark songs, which happens to conclude with de la Rocha repeating the chant “F@#% you! I won’t do what you tell me!” about forty-three times. As he broke into the final round, he urged the fans on to join him, and the auditorium was filled with their zealous response, hands shooting up in unison in a scene straight from Leni Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will*. It

was remarkable: tens of thousands of young white boys, shouting this muscular mantra of rebellion, nonconformity, and defiance, all in one obedient, mechanical chorus; all at the behest of a rockstar. It was awesome and terrible to behold. The irony was palpable. (In fact, somebody tried to pass it to me, but I waved them off.)

Equally ironic, of course, is that this was rebellious, nonconforming, defiant Marxism *for sale*. And, at only thirty bucks a pop! Seven of which goes to TicketMaster, the near-monopoly ticket czar; twelve to Sony, your

Certainly it takes much less thought and time to look at the cool picture of Malcolm X biting his lip and holding aloft his fist in defiance on the cover of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, then it does to actually read and understand what’s inside.

local neighborhood global entertainment empire; six to the owner of the arena (oh, wait, that was Sony, too); two to the band; and three to the cost of the tour, things like equipment and stage sets, the last of which included a cool upside-down American flag with the anarchy symbol spray-painted on it. (This is an unresearched, fictional breakdown of ticket capital, but you get the point.) In the booths outside the pavilion you could pick up a t-shirt with a rad image of an about-to-be-thrown Malatov cocktail on the back, only twenty-five dollars. Truly, whether or not the revolution will be televised is no longer up for debate; the only question that remains is how much the pay-per-view will be. And what a rush revolution is: it felt almost as good as the Def Leppard concert I went to in the seventh grade. Revolution, by these standards, looks alot like a fraternity’s annual charity golf outing: you get to have a good time, and convince your conscience that you’re helping those who couldn’t afford to join the party. And there’s lots of beer. Boy, revolution is easy.

You might think I hold Rage in contempt for all of this: well, yeah, I do, but that’s not really the point. The fact is, Rage Against the Machine are making at least some sort of attempt to achieve their objectives (which seems to be, and I’m only giving my best guess here, worldwide violent Socialist revolution incited by three minute funk-metal anthems). I’ll be happy to give ‘em an ‘A’ for effort. But at the end of the night the only



revolution I saw was the beer coming out of the wispy sixteen-year old in the parking lot. Everyone got back in their Explorers and Jimmys and went home to the suburbs.

But wait, you ask. Doesn't all of this support, rather than negate *Appropriation Theory*? Doesn't this show that "the bad guys" have twisted and appropriated for profit the rebellion of "the good guys," effectively neutering the power it has? Doesn't this show that at heart, Rage Against the Machine is actually right, and that the audience just doesn't get it? Doesn't this show that the Machine Against which we should Rage really is the Establishment, that the message only gets lost when it gets mixed up with "the Man?" No. And if you stick with me just a little bit longer, I'll explain why.

You see, it turns out that Rage are not turncoats after all. For the atheist/Marxist/Trotskyite (I am generalizing here; there are hundreds of brands of atheistic, pro-violence Socialism, and I do not claim to speak to all of them) rebellion and revolution are a matter of self-assertion. These are the inevitable consequences of the oppression of humanity which, for the sake of humanity, for the sake of "truth" itself, must rise to assert its right to have power over itself. It is a matter of saying, 'I deserve this, and I'm gonna take it, and you can't stop me.' It is self-gratification cloaked in the more socially acceptable term, 'self-actualization,' and Rage Against the Machine's show reflected the heart of this ideology very, very well. There, at the center, we see that the real message, stripped bare of all of its admittedly well-intentioned political and humanitarian trappings, is about saying, "F@#% you! I won't do what you tell me!" to any-, and everybody; It's about screaming, "I'm taking what's mine and anyone in my way gets kicked in the teeth," And because means and end are ultimately inseparable, or, in the language of media theory, because the medium is the message, even if the 'anyone' who happen to get in the way happens to be Rage themselves, they too will get 'kicked in the teeth.' This was never more lucidly articulated than at the other apex of the show, near the end when the band halted its blistering set to bring to the stage some family and friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal. Here we saw the true nature of the monster which Rage's ideology had created.

"You may think that you watched the trial of the century on TV this year," de la Rocha began, referring to the O.J. Simpson murder case. "But the real trial of the century happened in your town." With that he handed the stage and microphone over to Jamal's supporters who began to urge the crowd to learn more about the trial, to get involved, and to speak and act out against what they believed to be an unjust verdict. Before the first activist had spoken about three sentences, the catcalls began. Soon she was almost

completely drowned out, even as she spoke louder to be heard above the din, by a chorus of boos, racial epithets, cries of "Copkiller!" and "Get of the stage!" Within moments it was plain to see that the vast majority of the fans had no interest in Rage's social causes, and quite a few were actively opposed; almost all were pretty annoyed at the interruption of their disobedience orgasm, peeved that now their high might wear off before the show was over. The mood of the crowd had shifted from boredom to hostility in about ten seconds, while my own attitude went from morbid curiosity as to what was occurring, to outright embarrassment. It seemed as though de la Rocha was a little bit embarrassed himself as he stepped back to the microphone after the activists had left the stage, though he wasn't quite as pissed as I thought he might have been. "Much respect to those who listened respectfully," he said simply (which amounted to, counting all of the ushers and security guards, the band themselves, and the many unconscious teenagers on the lawn behind us, about eighty-five people) and with that the band launched into a vigorous cover of Boogie Down Production's seminal protest song, "The Sound of the Police." Rage Against the Machine had dutifully climbed back on to the horse off of which they'd been brutally clotheslined, and were ably leading the charge of rebellion, as the crowd resumed its role of obedient mob scene. But by now it was all too clear that they were going nowhere; all that would be taken away from the show by the vast majority of the fans was a new Rage Against the Machine t-shirt to prove to the world what side of the line they are on.

"You say you want a revolution?"

Unfortunately for Rage, they've bought into *Appropriation Theory*'s strict delineation between "us and them," "good guy" and "bad guy," when in fact there is no real delineation. Rebellion (or, more truly, the image of rebellion) is everyone's favorite stance. Corporate America is just as committed, even more so, to our rebellion as are young, angry Socialist rockers. Everywhere you look the Establishment is encouraging our rebellion. And in the end, whether you are one side of *Appropriation Theory* or the other, (You can tell which side you're on if you've ever had, or currently have, a nosering, dreadlocks, or a tattoo. A special honorable mention if you have a Sub Pop album released before 1991) we are always told to rebel by being self-serving, by satisfying our immediate desires, by thumbing our nose and flouting tradition, religion, parents, and repressive institutions. Furthermore, the way we're most often told we can do this is by purchasing the products we want. Take a good look at the television and print ads you see in the next day or two, you can't miss it.



Burger King caters to the Madonnas and James Deans of this world, telling them “Your way, right away,” and “Sometimes you gotta break the rules.” Levi’s encourages us to “Celebrate [Our] Specialness” with a pair of SilverTabs. Izod runs an ad in which a golf cart full of decked-out models cuts off a golf cart full of stiffies for some “Extreme Leisure.” And Chevrolet glibly advertises the new Camaro as “an arrogant display of attitude and power.”

In all fairness, Rage is not selling the same stuff as Burger King or Chevy, but the sale is still on, with the

Beyond the surface, there aren't  
two opposing sides, but one  
nation under a spell of narcissism  
gone monstrous, feeding on  
consumerism and image.

same means of selling: rebellion. While Corporate America hawks burgers and sport utility vehicles with the allure of this image, Rage sell themselves and their ethos with the very same message: “F@#% you! I won’t do what you tell me!” The capitalists have not so much appropriated the revolutionary ethos and turned it against itself, as they have discovered that, in the end, revolution and Adam Smith-style profiteering are based on the same ethic. “I’m taking what’s mine and anyone in my way gets kicked in the teeth.” Rage certainly found this out the hard way when they attempted to inject an issue of justice and mercy (the Mumia Abu-Jamal trial) into their show and found that issues of justice mercy do not cohere with skin-deep blind rebellion sold by means of image. *Appropriation Theory* maintains that it makes a difference as to what is being sold, but it doesn’t at all, especially when you consider that, as stated above, the medium is the message. And when the medium and message are the glossy image of rebellion spewed by Rage, you get the thousands of pre- and post-pubescent sycophants at the Sony Entertainment Center who could not wait to hear “F@#% you! I won’t do what you tell me,” a refrain they no doubt shouted the whole trip home.

And as we consider the younger fans of that night, our critique comes full circle. I’ll consistently acknowledge the sincerity of Rage’s members, but I must recognize also that in all de la Rocha’s earnest crying, screaming and kicking he resembles an earnest child more than an earnest revolutionary. Like children, the members of Rage see the lines of “us-vs.-them,” “the good guy” and “the bad guy” much too simply, not rec-

ognizing the false foundation which underlies both categories, and not recognizing that true rebellion is rooted in something radically different than a t-shirt with Che Guevara’s face on it. “I won’t do what you tell me...” Is this the rallying cry of the revolutionary or the defiant kid who won’t clean his room? Like a child, Rage constantly asserts themselves against authority in an uncritical, unthinking way. Sometimes rebellion against authority is exactly what is called for, but when this happens, and so much more importantly, how this happens, is a question which must be answered by the wisdom of the mature, not by a child.

As Christians we cannot stand with proponents of either side of *Appropriation Theory*, and the rebellion which they both are selling. For though they each come from ideological extremes, they both are rooted in a materialism and an idolatry of self that is contrary to God’s will and way. Both ideologies claim to liberate humankind through rebellion, yet they both ultimately prove to be oppressive because of that materialism, and the glorification of self which they maintain. Self-justification, self-righteousness and self-assertion are moot points for the Christian. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is our justification and our righteousness, and we assert not ourselves, but his love alone to a world already nauseatingly full of human self-assertion. Christians are blessed in that we have been taken out of this sinful world for fellowship with God, and then are charged to return to that same sinful world in service to God and our neighbor. This blessing enables us to navigate between the competing falsehoods that battle across the field of *Appropriation Theory*: we know that the world is not following Marx’s path of inexorable progress towards a classless utopia, and that the divisions of sin will always be among us. Yet at the same time, the Christian recognizes that because what is true is what God names as true, the divisions of sin in this world are not “realities” that we must adjust to, but lies which fight against. The Christian fights against the powers and principalities which deny justice and mercy and love, but we must refuse to battle on the grounds that these powers would have us fight; not with the knee-jerk rebellion and will to power of the so-called “good guys,” nor by exploiting the power structures for our own satisfaction with the so-called “bad guys,” but with the fragile, yet irresistible forces of justice, mercy and love.

Rage also seems to want to fight against these powers and principalities, and for that we commend them; but inasmuch as they are fighting from a decidedly and intentionally non-Christian stance, employing images of rebellion, and naive self-assertion as both means and end in the struggle, they will continue to fail, miserably, as we saw them do last summer in Philadelphia.



## BOOK REVIEWS

*Scottish Theology: From John Knox to John McLeod Cambell*, T.F. Torrance, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996.

For the uninitiated reader of T.F. Torrance, this latest work on Scottish theology might appear to be a bit of a departure from the trinitarian and scientific works from which he is more well known; yet for those who have followed his career, *Scottish Theology* is a fitting tribute to a rich theological tradition whose theologians and pastors Torrance has looked to as a student and an heir throughout his career. As a minister, professor, former Moderator of the General Assembly in the Church of Scotland (1976-77), and founder of the *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Torrance's interest in Scottish theology is anything but passive.

Dedicated to New College of Edinburgh, the school in which Torrance distinguishably held the chair of Christian Dogmatics for 27 years, *Scottish Theology* has an understandably limited but noble focus. The theologians and movements which Torrance so aptly lays out will probably be foreign to most readers, however what is most surprising about this book is that the particular issues which arise in this historical representation have a theological component which transcends their setting. In a way unique to Torrance, it is always the theology behind the people and the movements which comes to the fore, and Torrance has no trouble offering critique and praise along the way.

To limit this book to a mere recounting of Scottish church history would be to miss the dynamic way in which Torrance engages his predecessors in deep and meaningful conversation about the theology and life of the Kirk. This being said, it cannot be stressed enough that the particular discussion that Torrance has with Scottish theology is not exclusive to Scottish theologians—it is a conversation which is meant to be (and should be) heard by all those who find their life tied up

within the life of the Reformed church.

This is clearly seen in Torrance's first chapter, "John Knox and the Scottish Reformation." Of interest to Presbyterians and Congregationalists in any land, Torrance here is proud to remind us all of the rich and solid ground upon which Knox and his contemporaries established their church. Most important to Torrance is that during this formative stage, the Kirk under the direction of Knox, built into the fabric of their theology a truly trinitarian framework; one in which "the Trinity is not added on to a prior conception of the doctrine of God, but belongs to the basic and essential content of the doctrine of God."<sup>1</sup> This is a constant refrain of Torrance throughout the book, and as we see in his treatment of the "Westminster Tradition," that this was an unfortunate tendency in how the Westminster divines viewed God's triune nature.

Torrance takes us to Westminster via chapters on the "Older Scottish Tradition," and "The High Calvinists." It is here where two strands of Scottish theology began to develop, producing a terrible rift between those who held to a rigid and legalistic understanding of God's decrees interpreted from Scripture (federalists), and those who interpreted Scripture in light of God's gracious and free love to all (universalists). Much like the way in which Presbyterianism developed here in the United States, there came to prominence two distinct manifestations of the Christian faith within the Reformed Kirk. The federalists, or covenanters as they were called, stressed a strict adherence to the articles of the Westminster Confession which included a rather static form of predestination that was often wielded as a pre-text for biblical interpretation and exposition. The universalists or Marrow Men as they would later be termed, were evangelical Calvinists who insisted upon a more biblical view of Christ's atonement for all in an attempt to offset what they considered an unwarranted



stress the federalists were placing upon the doctrine of predestination. There were problems with both camps, but it is ironic that the strength the universalists showed in stressing the universal atonement of Christ was also their weakness. For in emphasizing the universal aspect of the atonement, they refused to see within it God's righteous judgment upon sin and therefore often misconstrued universal atonement for universal salvation. As can be seen, the differences between the federalists and the universalists could not have been more acute, but it was the "rigidly scholastic and rationalistic form of Calvinism in which logico-causal relations tended to replace ontological relations" that was to assert a heavier influence within lives of the Kirk's ministers and parishioners (p. 60).

In the "Westminster Tradition," Torrance, like Barth, is appreciative of the work of the Westminster academy in providing the Protestant faith with its first thoroughly biblical dogmatics, yet this does not keep him from criticizing their work at key points. Torrance makes it clear that the Confession is not a product of the Scottish theology (p. 127). For "Westminster theology treats biblical statements as definite propositions from which deductions are to be made...they are not treated as in the Scots Confession, as having an open-ended character, pointing away from themselves to divine truth..." (p. 129) "The problem," Torrance writes, "is not so much with the content, but with the fact that doctrine of the Trinity appears as an addendum to the doctrine of God" (p. 131). This is a departure from Calvin himself and the Nicene faith, who together rightly assert that the communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit belong to the very essence of God as God and that this relationship governs any knowledge we have of God mediated to us through the Son.

In the final analysis, "the tendency to trace the ultimate ground of belief back to eternal divine decrees behind the back of the Incarnation of God's Beloved Son, as in a federal concept of *pre*-destination, tended to foster a hidden Nestorian dualism between the divine and human natures in the one Person of Jesus Christ, and thus even to provide ground for a dangerous form of Arian and Socinian heresy in which the atoning work of Christ, regarded as an organ of God's activity, was separated from his intrinsic nature and character of God as Love." (p. 133, italics his) Here Torrance is most polemical. He is not accusing the Westminster Confession of being an Arian or Nestorian document, but is rather stating that within it there is a tendency to emphasize the form of the Confession over its function—the form of which does not give adequate enough consideration of the triune nature of God.

The book takes a welcomed shift after the "Westminster Tradition" as Torrance seeks to highlight the life of "Robert Leighton, Episcopal Calvinist," a truly

mediatorial figure in the contentious climate of the Kirk after the Confession. Even as a covenanter, Leighton was rancorously ostracized from the church for 'not preaching up to the times,' as he reacted strongly against the manner in which the newly formed decrees of the Kirk concerning predestination were played out over against its parishioners' need for assurance of salvation. This is a reoccurring theme of church life in Scotland as the real issue of personal assurance of one's salvation was often neglected by the pastors and theologians who gave higher allegiance to the Westminster Confession and its rule than to the rule of love in Christ as in the earlier Scots Confession.

Next, Torrance takes us through the "Presbyterian Tradition," "Eighteenth Century Presbyterianism," and "Early Nineteenth-Century Theology," with in-depth analysis of the work of James Fraser, Thomas Boston and Thomas Erskine, surveying as well the controversies between the Covenanters and the Marrow Men. As noted earlier, there are more than a few similarities between the way the Presbyterian tradition has manifested itself in Scotland and in the United States, and Torrance handles the two opposing theological streams (federalists/universalists in Scotland, and the Old Side/New Side in America) together with insightful critique.

On the one hand, Torrance, echoing the thought of James Fraser, will have nothing to do with the idea that predestination implies that "there is a necessary connection between the death of Christ and sinners," as did the federalists (p. 197). For Torrance, like Fraser, ultimately rejects "the scholastic Calvinist way of thinking of atonement in terms of logico-causal relations...so that a doctrine of limited atonement was put forward which was restricted to the elect for whom alone the saving death of Christ was held to be necessary and causally efficacious" (p. 198).

Yet on the other hand, Torrance does not go as far as the universalists like Thomas Erskine, for as Torrance says: "The doctrine of unconditional grace and universal pardon cannot be twisted into universal salvation without evacuating the Cross of its profound nature and ultimate meaning, and distorting the self-revelation of God as Holy Love" (p. 277).

To right these errors, "a decisive shift had to be made away from the logical framework of double predestination and rigid law in federal Calvinism...to one that was appropriate to the atonement itself in its own light and in accordance with its own intrinsic nature, and not from external considerations" (p. 293). This is exactly what Torrance shows us in his last chapter on the work of John McLeod Campbell.

It is a strength of this work that Torrance illuminates for us the broad scope and meaning that the doctrine of the Incarnation holds for Christian life and theology. For Torrance, as for John McLeod Campbell,



the Incarnation and the Atonement are to be read together, for read as one they contain the manifestation of God's holy love toward sinners. In summarizing the thought of Cambell, Torrance writes: "It was not just to the Incarnation that McLeod Cambell turned as his starting point, but to the Incarnation in its relation to the atonement as developed in the Incarnation. It is in that indissoluble interrelation that we learn that God is Love, and that since he is Love he loves all people without exception, for he is, and cannot be as God, toward them other than he is in himself. *That is the ultimate ground of atonement*" (p. 297, italics his).

There is no doubt that this exploration in Scottish theology might have looked quite different had it been written by someone else, and the charge might be advanced that Torrance is reading into these early figures his own understanding of what Scottish theology is about. Yet these are difficult charges to sustain when the primary sources which Torrance provides so abundantly, only echo the account that Torrance offers in this assessment. Perhaps at times the presentation does lapse into a sounding board for Torrance's own theological convictions, not allowing the full picture to develop before telling us what we see. But if this is merely a sounding board for Torrance, there are few sounding boards so important for today's pastor and theologian.

*Scottish Theology* offers for the careful reader much more than just a lesson in the theological development of the Kirk, but gives at every turn a deep and penetrating look at the real theological issues which have plagued the Reformed Church since its inception. For those unfamiliar with the work of T.F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology* is a solid introduction into the theology of the Reformed Church. Within its pages Torrance exposes himself as a evangelical scholar whose great theological acumen is seen most clearly in his service and commitment to the life and welfare of the Church. For those readers who are familiar with Torrance, *Scottish Theology* sheds new light on aspects of Torrance's theology. Predestination, especially as it is seen in the light of the Incarnation, is only one such example. From whatever place one comes, *Scottish Theology* is a book as rich as the tradition to which it speaks.

Scott Lumsden, PTS '98

Mark, Oden, Thomas, and Christopher Hall, eds., *Ancient Christian Commentary Series: New Testament II*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998.

While the editors of many contemporary biblical commentary series are seeking to replace "outdated" volumes (i.e. those that were written over 25 years ago), IVP has recently announced that it will publish a commentary series built on the contributions of authors who lived 2,000 years ago! The *Ancient Christian Commentary Series* (ACCS), edited by Thomas Oden of Drew University, is dedicated to presenting a verse-by-verse commentary on the books of the Bible based on the writings of the church fathers (from the end of the New Testament period to 750 AD). When the series is complete, it will be comprised of 27 volumes covering the Old and New Testaments and the Apocrypha. The first two volumes of the series, on Mark and Romans, have been released this year.

A commentary series gleaned from the church fathers brings a much-needed voice to the arena of contemporary biblical commentary. Protestants have in many ways moved too far from the traditions and practices of the pre-Reformation church. By cutting ourselves off from these fifteen centuries we have lost a wealth of resources and insights. The ACCS seeks to tap one such resource by building a bridge to the earliest interpreters of the bible, and for this contribution we should be thankful. The type of commentary on the biblical texts that we find among the church fathers is of a different sort than that to which we are accustomed in the prevailing climate of socio-historical, literary, and cultural commentary. Ancient commentators were much more interested in a theological and spiritual reading of the text. In their unique way, the church fathers approached a text with a level of reverence and reflection that yielded beautiful insights into the meaning of the text for the life of the church as well as the faith of the individual believer. As a result, pastors will find in these volumes a valuable tool for sermon preparation. This series would also serve as a wonderful companion to the devotional reading of scripture.

To suggest that the commentary of the church fathers is thus beneficial for homiletical and devotional uses is not to suggest that it is of no scholarly value. (I would also add that I am not suggesting that modern commentaries have no homiletical or devotional use; the Interpretation series is a wonderful example of just such uses.) For example, the ancient commentators' intimate knowledge of the texts allowed them to see the motifs, themes, and theological programs of particular writers in a way that anticipates much modern literary criticism. It would thus be unwise to dismiss the interpretive methods of the church fathers as pre-



critical. Scholars can benefit greatly by opening themselves to an age of interpretation in which the assumptions and methods were considerably different than our own. It is, moreover, in the interaction of different perspectives that new insights and paradigms can emerge.

The format of the present commentary on Mark is fairly straightforward. A pericope from Mark is cited, and then follows a catena (chain) of comments from selected church fathers on those verses; there are roughly anywhere from three to fifteen patristic citations for each passage. In addition, Oden and Hall have composed a detailed and helpful critical apparatus that gives 1) exhaustive references to the sources of the patristic comments, 2) notes to help the reader with difficult or obscure concepts and allusions, and 3) cross-referencing of Markan passages to related passages in the synoptics.

While sharing the benefits of the series described above, there is, however, a disappointing element in this particular volume. The problem stems from the fact that the Gospel of Mark was generally overshadowed by those of Matthew and Luke in the writings of the church fathers, and consequently there are no verse-by-verse commentaries on Mark in the ancient church as there are on the other three gospels. Thus Oden and Hall, as they describe in the introduction (p. xxi), searched for embedded references to Mark in texts that were not directly dealing with Mark. This is certainly a valid method for gleaning commentary on Mark's Gospel.

I discovered, however, that in fact the majority of patristic passages cited do not have any specific referent to Mark's Gospel. The baptism of Jesus in Mark serves as an example (Mk. 1:9-11; pp. 11-16 of the commentary). Of the 19 patristic comments cited, none was specifically a comment on Mark. Rather, they are either general comments about Jesus' baptism or are comments that actually have Matthew's Gospel in view. In two of the citations (from Hippolytus, *The Divine-Human Reconciliation*, pp. 11-12 and, Augustine *The Triune Presence*, p. 14) Oden and Hall are forced to omit the citation of Matt. 3:16-17, the text that in these cases Hippolytus and Augustine were discussing. As a result of this method of citation, I felt misled by the claim that these were comments on Mark. The fact of the matter is that there really is not enough patristic commentary on Mark to compile an entire book. In order to do so, Oden and Hall take general comments and apply them to the passages in Mark with which they can match them. We thus do not have in this volume patristic commentary on Mark, but rather a collection of gospel commentary that is worked into a Markan framework.

This volume is not without value; certainly general

comments on events and teachings in the gospels serve indirectly as commentary on those events and teachings in Mark. One would simply wish that Oden and Hall had been more forthright about the nature of the comments they had compiled.

As an effort to introduce to the general reading public to the collective insight of the earliest works of Christian Scriptural commentary, the goal of the ACCS is undoubtedly an admirable and worthy one. However, as far as the gospels are concerned, IVP has opened with a weak effort in the Mark volume in that they have intended to create a commentary despite the relative absence of patristic comment on Mark. I look forward to the publication of the volumes on Matthew, Luke, and John, for which there is a much greater wealth of early church commentary.

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